



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

AL 1173.7.75

Harvard College Library

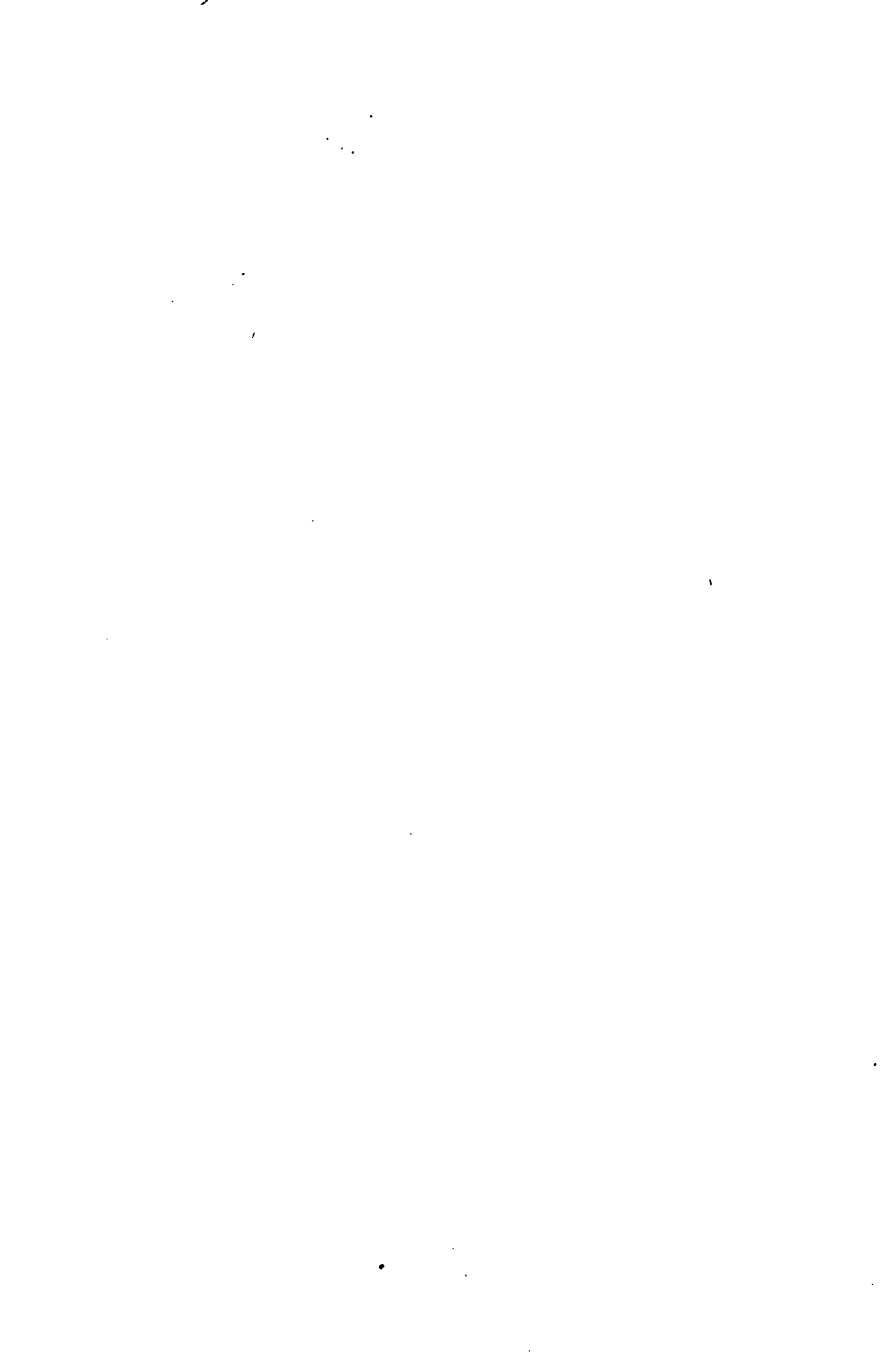


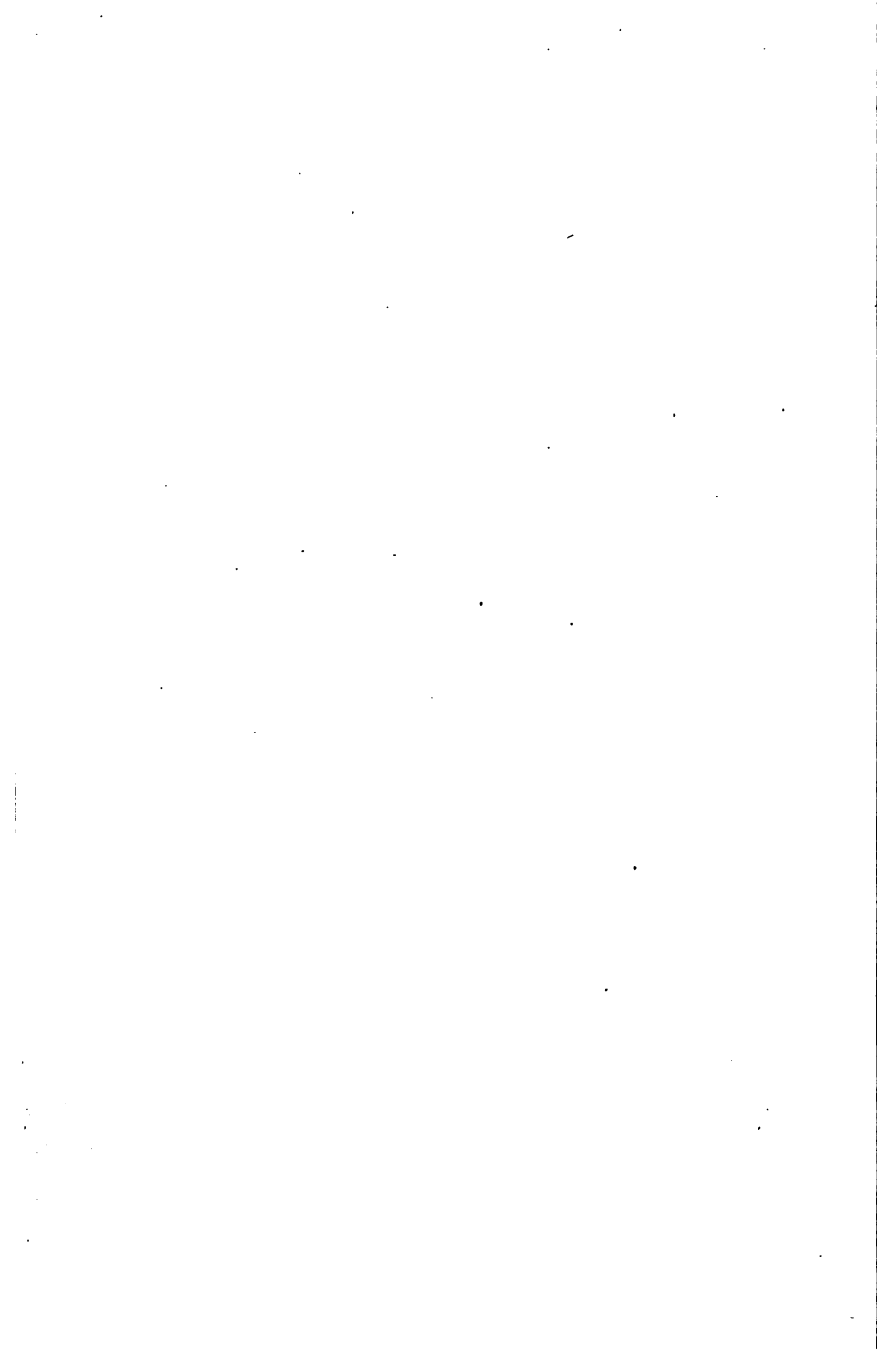
BEQUEST OF

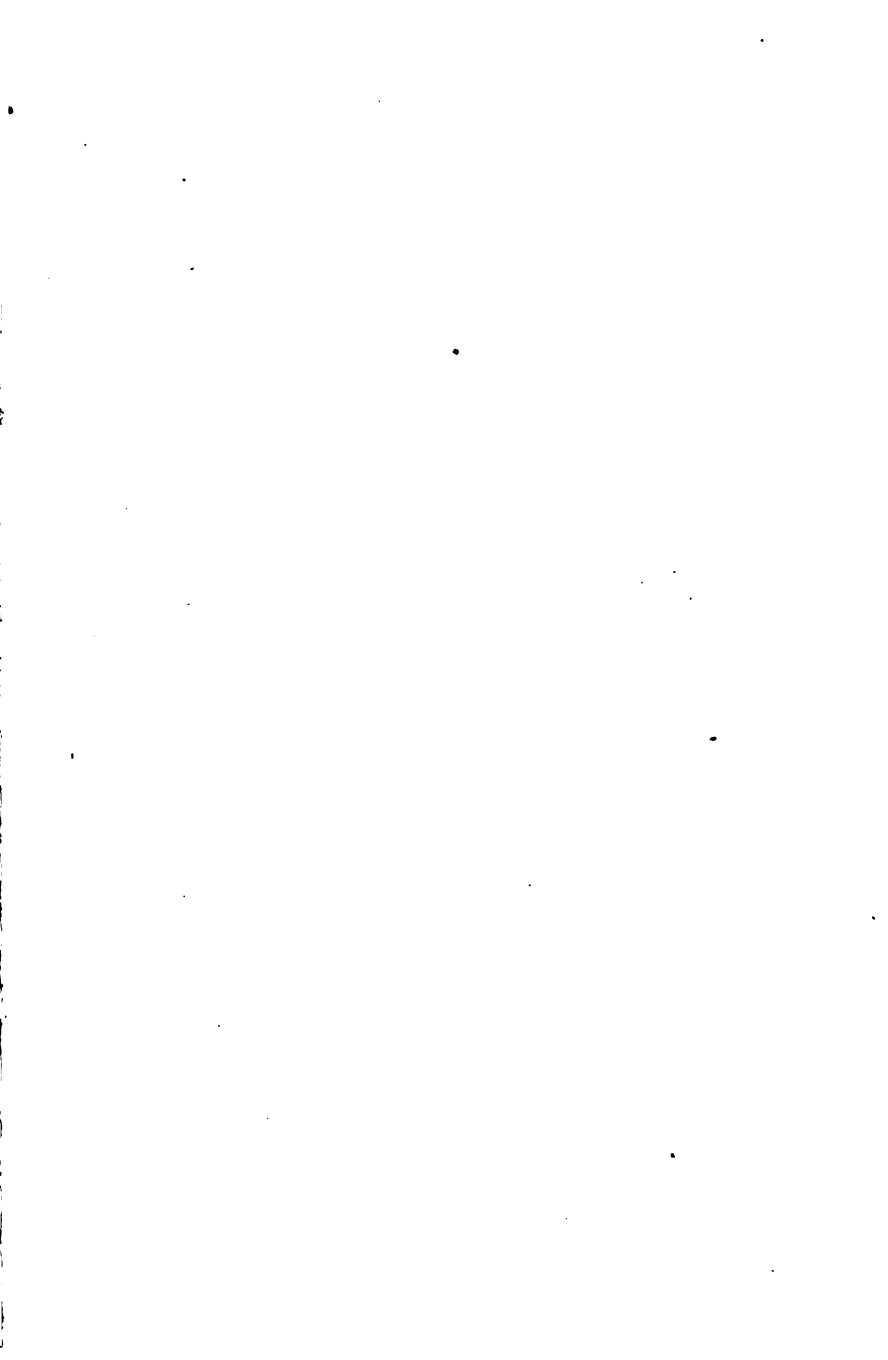
WILLIAM McMICHAEL WOODWORTH

(Class of 1888)

**KEEPER OF THE MUSEUM OF COMPARATIVE
ZoöLOGY, 1899-1904.**









[See page 164

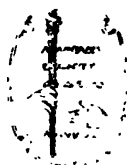
“BY JOVE, CINDERELLA, WHO IS YOUR FAIRY GODMOTHER?”

A
SUCCESSFUL WIFE

G. DORSET

ILLUSTRATED

"Not a cry from its pages to-day."



HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
MCMX



THE FAIRY GODMOTHER

“A, WHO IS YOUR FAIRY GODMOTHER?”

c

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

A STORY

BY
G. DORSET

ILLUSTRATED

"Not every woman is trained to courage."



HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
MCMX

AL 1173.7.75

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
BEQUEST OF
WILLIAM McMICHAEL WOODWORTH
FEB. 19, 1915.

Copyright, 1910, by HARPER & BROTHERS

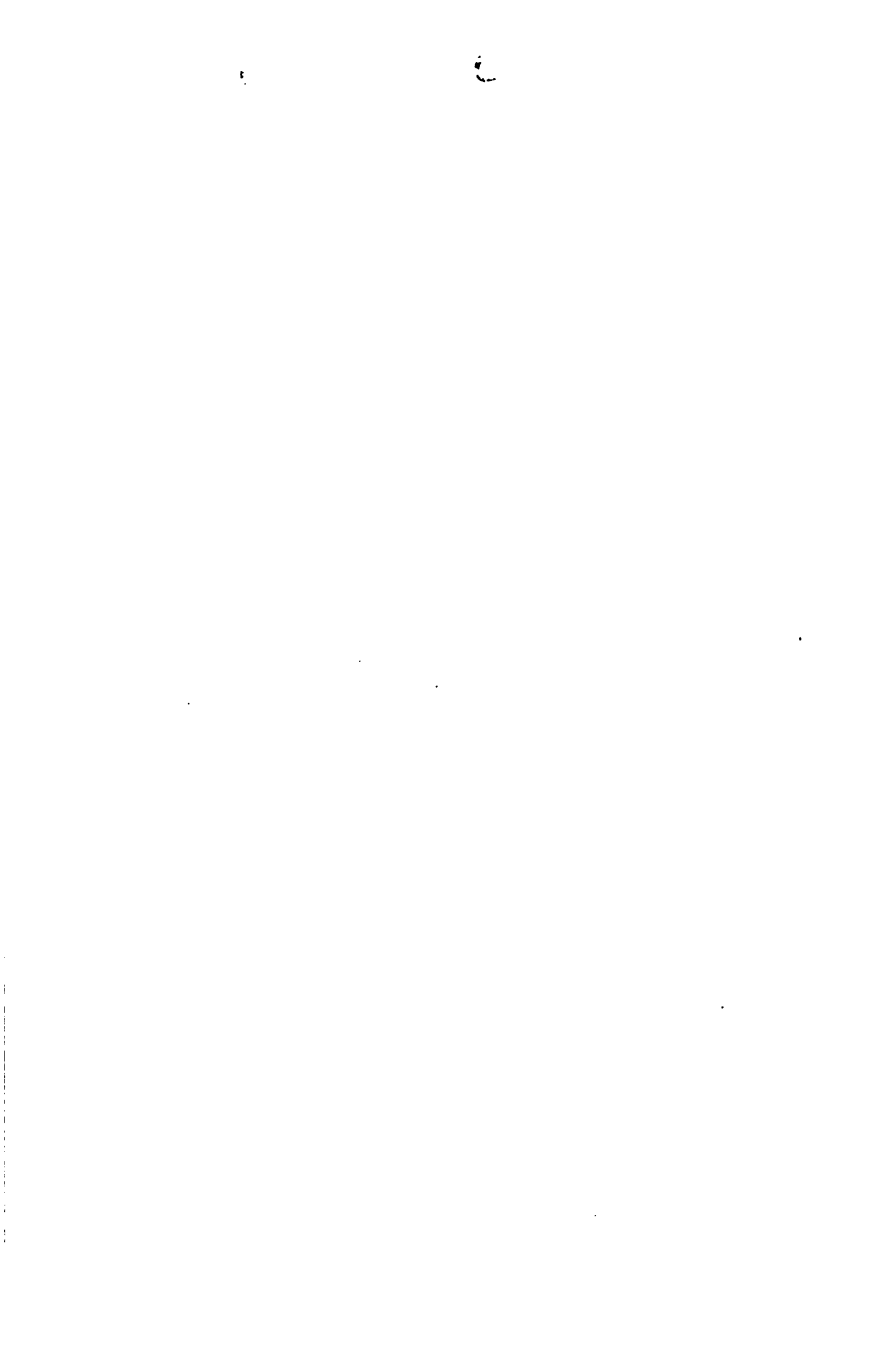
Published August, 1910.

Printed in the United States of America

5713.7
65-126
1

ILLUSTRATIONS

"BY JOVE, CINDERELLA, WHO IS YOUR FAIRY GODMOTHER?"	<i>Frontispiece</i>
"I WANT A <i>WOMAN</i> FOR A WIFE"	<i>Facing p.</i> 10
"IT WILL BE SUPERB TO FIND OURSELVES ABOVE THESE PETTY ANNOYANCES"	" 98
HE BADE ME GOOD-BYE, NOT MEETING MY EYES	" 146



A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

CHAPTER I



MY father died when I was fifteen years old, and my mother, then ailing with the same malady, found herself dependent upon me, the eldest of her five children. The day of father's funeral the smallest child stayed at home with mother, and they sat waiting for us at the window when we came home. It was spring, and even though I was sad I noticed the dandelions spotting the lawn like yellow stars.

Our house was a small wooden one, the yard only a few feet wide, and the neighbors could look in through our windows.

That night, when the children were in bed, mother and I sat talking in her room, and it seemed as though she couldn't live the week out—she coughed after every few sentences. Around her shoulders, over her night-dress, she wore a gray shawl. Her eyes were beautiful and clear.

"It is going to be hard for you, Esther," she said to me.

We were not a family of sentimentalists, but I think I said to mother then about the words she wanted to hear, though they weren't immortal or clever.

"Oh, we'll get along all right. We don't owe any money."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

I asked her if she had enough covering, and whether she wished powders to make her sleep, and she called me to her and gave me a kiss. Then she began to cough dreadfully.

I sat up-stairs in my bedroom for quite a while looking at "ads" in the paper. I noticed this:

"WANTED—A young girl to learn typewriting. Wall Street. Salary paid to beginner."

The next day I went to New York and applied. They engaged me at five dollars a week. We had enough money left from father's bank-account to pay the funeral expenses and buy me a commutation ticket, and the house-rent had been paid for us by an uncle in the South for the last few years. This left me clear twenty dollars a month to feed and clothe six of us.

My remembrance of any tragedy in the situation isn't clear. There was never a moment of despair in our household. The people liked mother in Brackettsville. Nobody bothered us for money, and we lived for a year on kindness in the town and what I made. Then Fanny joined me in my daily pilgrimage to and from New York, starting in just as I had—at five per week, and I was raised the next year to ten dollars.

Together we fed and clothed and educated the boys. None of us were imaginative, so we were spared cooking up the miseries and worries that cleverer people make for themselves. We never saw anything "picturesque" or "dreadful" in our fight for life, and I never heard a complaint at home. I don't recall a wish expressed that was beyond the gratification of our means. Perhaps we were without hearts. Perhaps we were too *proud*. Perhaps, 'way down in us, were springs which years of need and

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

care and repression had never suffered to be uncovered; perhaps that crust kept the waters still and deep. I do not know.

We had simple pleasures, and Fanny took them; I was too tired. For many years my midday lunch in New York cost me ten cents a day—no more. I was underfed and overworked. I went to bed right after dinner. Parties in Brackettsville didn't tempt me out, but Fanny loved to dance, and she had a party-dress and a pair of thin shoes.

Two years after father, mother died. I cannot write about it. . . .

I went to the city the day after the funeral, and at four o'clock fainted at my machine. I don't believe I shed a single tear at the house. I felt as though the world were one big burden tied to my shoulders, and I gave way under it. I guess fainting is another sign of tears. When I came to I heard the office boy say to a girl they had called in from the next office: "Her mother was buried yesterday, and she was too proud to ask for more than one day off."

There is no reason why I, of all others in the wide world, should write the "annals of a life," unless it may be that in some way or other they may serve to encourage a woman here and there. Perhaps some woman with little education and a great deal of timidity may be interested in my life.

I don't think there is a creature living who would not love to be "successful," and who isn't ready to spend twenty-five cents or even twenty-five dollars on a book which would tell them "how to succeed." You hear such a lot of talk nowadays about success! I don't pretend to write such a book. But looking at the opening of my life in the small Brackettsville house, when five of us stood around mother's coffin,

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

with only me to support the family—when I contrast that picture with to-day I suppose people *would* say that I have made a success. In this case, if what I have to tell can give any woman or any wife *courage*—why, then, the pages are worth while!

CHAPTER II



WOULDN'T be surprised if I had been cut out to go into the niche Fate set for me; I seemed to fit in from the first! Nobody knew when I was tired, frightened, or disheartened; I didn't have feelings that were hurt, and I didn't cry. I wore thin clothes in the winter and thick clothes in the summer. My feet were wet, and I didn't get ill. I lost my place in the bad season of the year and I didn't commit suicide, and a sense of humor helped me through. Pretty clothes and hats I did not crave, but I must say I never saw a nice boot or a pair of gloves that I didn't long for them!

There was a period of six weeks of hard times, and when things were at their bluest I answered an advertisement in the paper for some work to be done in one of the big houses on Fifth Avenue.

When I gave my name at the door I was shown into an up-stairs sitting-room opening off a bedroom. It was February, and I had walked up from Twenty-third Street Ferry to save the fare. It was so bitter cold that the exercise hadn't warmed me. My clothes were too thin for comfort, and I didn't own a pair of rubbers. I was too dulled with cold to notice the house, but I worked there afterward and grew to admire all the pretty things.

In a few moments a maid beckoned me to step into the

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

next room, where a lady in bed, propped up with pillows, received me. As she made arrangements with me, my sight grew clear enough to notice the big bed with its fine sheets, its warm silk covers—everything so expensive and elegant, and, to me, so new. She asked me to take my jacket off, but my blouse was in a shabby state and I refused. I felt as cold as if the wind and the snow outside, which I had walked in, had gone right down deep to my heart, and it was a relief to sit with my note-book on my knee and to take dictation for more than two hours. All day I had eaten nothing but my ten-cent lunch. Every now and then something gave way inside of me, and finally all culminated in one single feeling. As I waited for Mrs. Falsworth to consult a list, I looked down at the foot of her bed, *and there stood her little slippers*. I couldn't have described them properly then, but I can now. They were small and pink, made of fine brocade, with high French heels, and all corded around with a silver cord, and small pink rosettes at the top. They were so dainty and elegant, so restful, so *awfully* expensive-looking that they struck me terribly! I wouldn't have believed it if any one had told me what they cost, but I learned that she had paid twenty-five dollars for them. They were the final touch to the tired-outness and the meagreness of a long time—of the denials of a poor life for a long time—they were like a composite picture of everything Mrs. Falsworth had and of what it meant to *be a real lady*. The slippers were my size. I was proud, in a shy way, of my feet and my hands. I owned just one pair of shoes, and they were nearly worn out; as for a pair of bedroom slippers—some one knit mother a pair of gray bedroom shoes and I kept them, put them away with a few things in memory of her. When we got into bed we got in barefooted, all of

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

us. Those pink shoes stuck out from under Mrs. Falsworth's bed and mocked me, and I hated the lady for a moment and the people who could wear such things.

I rode to the ferry with a reckless anger in my heart. Those shoes danced before my eyes; they haunted me until I was frightened, and I wondered if I wasn't going to be ill. Crossing Twenty-third Street I looked out at the shop-windows, but there was nothing in any one of them like those slippers. That night, when I reached home, the image was so real that I wouldn't have been surprised to see them peep out from under my bed, from under the old darned quilt. They were not there, or any slippers at all, for that matter!

I wrote for Mrs. Falsworth for three weeks, and grew to like her. We were quite friendly. I explained about the slippers one day, but she didn't understand one little bit. I didn't mind the pretty things any longer, though, for I had a first-class position with a good firm down-town, and a high salary—for a girl.

CHAPTER III



ANNY and I kept the children at school and ran the household, and at twenty-five I was a business woman, with nothing in my circumstances out of the ordinary except that I had it rather easier than most. I had my own offices—two rooms on the tenth floor of — Wall Street. I had two assistants, working from 9 A.M. till, sometimes, far into the night. Those years I took in, net, twelve hundred dollars a year, and I felt secure and businesslike, and too busy to know whether or not I was happy.

I had the private work of several important offices. On one side the work of the office of Senator Bellars, and on the other side the work of the husband of my friend of the pink slippers, Mr. William Falsworth, who gave me his work in the morning himself and came himself in the evening to take it away.

I came to know Mrs. Falsworth very well. When I had first gone there to work, her husband was away, and we grew friends before he came home. Minnie was pretty and full of interests, and went out to “board meetings” every day. One day her husband said to her while I was present:

“The only Home Board you’re *not* on is No. — Fifth Avenue, Minnie.”

She was made up of dress and pink slippers, and reports of School Boards and Home Boards, and of little extrava-

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

gant things. Will Falsworth was made up of plain flesh and blood. When he came to look for his wife there was such a lot of *things* to brush away before he could find her, and when he did find her he was such a *real man*, that he used to make her shudder.

We had grown to be intimate, she and I, before he came home, but it wasn't a real friendship; it was so easy to slip into and it was so easy to slip out of afterward. She wasn't really interested in me. If I had been a report, she would have bought me and had me bound. If her husband had been a report, she might have learned him by heart.

The first time Mr. Falsworth saw me, I was working in the upstairs sitting-room. He had come in from the West, where he had been travelling for nearly a year, reorganizing his mines. He came in as if he expected to be met by his wife, but she was out.

I always think of people as I see them for the first time, and after that the image of them moves back and forth to or from the first impression. But Will Falsworth's stays the same. He was middle-sized and very good-looking. He seemed eager and bright and hopeful. He came in like a man from the war, glad to be home again—glad to come to a woman who would welcome him. Business is a good deal like war, anyhow; it takes it out of people. Even if the wounds and scars don't show, they are there all right.

"So you're the girl who has been sending me all those letters, are you?"

Minnie didn't come in until eleven o'clock, and by that time Mr. Falsworth had told me about his Western trip, and his success with the Wildwood Mines; and he must have thought that he was talking to some one whom he had known for more than an hour, for we looked honestly at

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

each other, and I understood how he felt about things from the start.

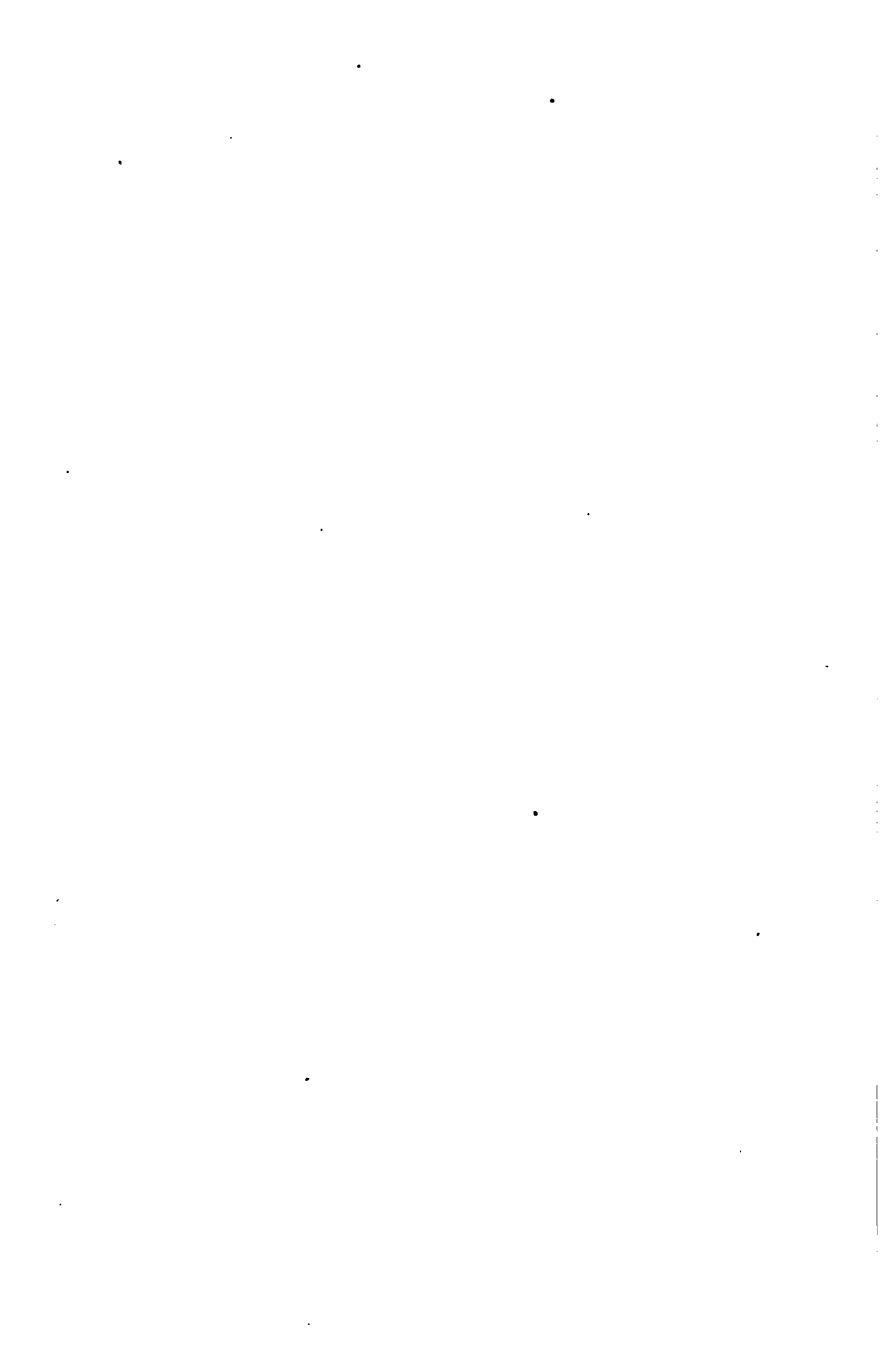
There was a lot of work about the reorganization of the mine, and I used to go to Mr. Falsworth's office and take dictation from nine till twelve. One day when I stopped writing and looked up it was two o'clock. He felt dreadfully, and, to please him, I accepted his invitation to go out and have something to eat. We went to a little restaurant near the Battery. It was a hot day, and we walked along down the Ship's Company to the Green. We had oysters first, and chicken. He ordered a little white wine and soda. I didn't want to take any of that, but he begged me, and so I did to please him. We ended up with mince-pie, coffee, and ice-cream, and when we came out it was four o'clock. He made me walk down to the Battery with him, and we went to the Aquarium together and saw the queer, pretty fish. There were only a few strollers outside, and some immigrants hunched up on seats. The day was clear as water and the port full of ships. Will Falsworth took hold of my arm and said:

"Esther, I want to go on one of those ships and take you along with me. Will you come?"

He had never said one word to me before, although I had been alone with him for hours at a time, but now it seemed natural. At first, when he made his startling suggestion about sailing out from the Battery, I just thought I would go! He led me over to a seat and there was no one there but ourselves, and we sat down and he talked to me a long while and I felt like crying. I looked at the boats and the water so long that I could draw pictures of every vessel in the harbor that day. When we got up to go at last it was dark. We had stayed there four hours, and it had seemed



"I WANT A *WOMAN* FOR A WIFE"



A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

like a moment. I hadn't said more than a few words myself, but I made him leave me there, and I got out of him a kind of promise to do just as I said. I thought I was stronger than he. When I watched him cross over to his car I walked up toward Chambers Street, crying hard. The tears rolled down like rain.

The next day I hadn't taken off my things when he appeared with a letter to dictate. He looked pale and troubled, but I wouldn't listen—just kept the machine going hard. At last he read out to me from one of his letters, "I am going to Colorado to-night, to be gone for several weeks," and I stopped writing. "Will you go with me, Esther?"

"Certainly not."

He folded the letter.

"Then I won't go to Colorado," he said. "It means a loss of a pile of money to me and to a lot of other people."

"You have got to go, or I will never speak to you again as long as I live."

He repeated under his breath: "But I will speak to you, Esther, as long as I live."

"It won't do you any good."

"We'll see, little girl, we'll see."

Then he began again, and I had to listen.

"I married some one, Esther, but I didn't get a *woman*. *I want a woman for a wife*. Every decent human man wants the same thing. I don't drink and I don't gamble, but I want a wife, Esther. I want a wife."

I put these words down because they go in with my story. It doesn't matter so much what he said about me or what he thought. He was very blind. He was lonely, above all;

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

that's what he was! And he was a flesh-and-blood man, and I understood him from the start.

I took his letters out of the machine and folded them. I put them in their envelopes as he directed me. I hadn't said one word, and he wound up with:

"Won't you speak to me, Esther?"

And I told him that if he didn't go to Colorado that night I would never speak to him again.

Here both my girls came in at once, and Will took his letters and went toward the door. He said out loud from the doorway:

"All right. Good-bye. I am off to-night, Miss Carey."

Then he wrote right there something in his note-book, tore out the slip, folded it up, and handed it back to me by Miss Frame:

"Here's my address—send along any other letters you may have, and don't forget to mail me *that last one*."

He emphasized: "*That last one to-night, Miss Carey.*"

When he had really gone, and all three of us were hard at work again clicking away, I looked at the slip he had given me. There was the address of his hotel in Chicago, the address of one in Denver, and Salt Lake—in fact, every city he passed through where he was going to stop. And some other things.

The next day I got a wire from Buffalo, and it only said: "*Speak to me, Esther.*"

CHAPTER IV



EVERYBODY knows about Senator Bellars. He had proposed his famous Tariff Bill in the Senate, and there was so much talk about it that I was proud to have his work in my office. The day after Will Falsworth left for the West a boy from the seventh floor came for me to go for some dictation in the Senator's offices—that they were in a rush. I felt excited, for, though I had worked for important business men, I had never seen any one so big as Senator Bellars.

He was walking up and down the floor of his private office. He made me take one of the leather chairs, and dictated, walking up and down in front of me, in a loud voice, as though he were arguing or addressing the Senate. I took his work for weeks after that, and it was always the same loud, hard voice crying out words at me. When I left it was a long time before I could get the sound out of my ears. After a few letters to different people in Washington, he walked up near me and stood right in front of me, staring down. I thought he was going to speak directly to me, and I was frightened to death, but his face was hard and set in anger, and before I had time to be much more terrified he began:

“MY DEAR STEVE [then I saw he was not thinking of me at all],—I am sick and tired of saying the same things to

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

you! God knows it doesn't seem to do any good, so I'm not going into the old matters again. You have run through three fortunes, and I don't intend to hand you out a fourth. You may come here to New York and do as I say, or you can stay where you are and go to the devil. You are thirty, and no fool, and you can work. If there is anything that sickens a man in the world I live in, who sees machines run and watches the nation's progress, it is to come against a poor performance of any kind. A bad violinist is as bad as a bad banker. *I like success.* I meant to have it myself from the start, and I got it. Now, I don't intend to stick up for failures of any kind. You are a damned poor painter, and so far you have been a poor citizen. You have gone your own way, but you did it on your own money. Now, I will help you and I will do it in my own way. You've got a magnificent education and you can use it. If you will pitch your sickening daubs out of the windows, and quit drink and cards and women and come to America, I will give you a job. You can work right here with me. I enclose a check to pay up your debts in Paris and get you here. Don't spend money on cables. Come.

"Your uncle, STEPHEN BELLARS."

When I had finished this letter, Mr. Bellars asked me to write it out in his office. And before I left him he made an appointment with me to do his private letters while his secretary was absent. After that I wrote for him every day for more than three weeks.

He was strict and cold and hard: a splendid old man with great, shaggy hair like a bush, and a gruff voice. He spoke with a slight Western accent. He made me think of a powerful engine that runs a great machine. Except for

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

a few remarks, he never spoke to me when I came or went. I don't think he thought about me, except that I was a good servant. Over and over I remembered what he said in his letter to Mr. Kirkland—"I don't like failures: I like successes"—and it made me more particular than ever to be the best I could in my position. When my time was up he mailed me a check for just double my bill. I sent the money back by Miss Long. When she returned she said Senator Bellars wanted to speak to me at once. He wasn't alone; there was a man sitting in one of the chairs by the window. Senator Bellars had his check and my bill in his hand.

"I sent you this amount, Miss Carey, because your work was worth it to me. I like to pay for what I get."

I said that he had done so—that I was fully paid.

"Then," he nodded, "you are a very foolish woman not to take all you can justly get in this world. You should regard it as a 'business deal'; your stock went up to par in those few days."

When he had finished talking, curiously enough, he'd made a difference in my point of view—I put my hand out and said:

"If you think it is really worth that amount, sir, I'll take the money."

He handed me back the check, laughing.

"You are a wise girl. When you see an open door, don't go and put your shoulders through a cellar window." He went on in the same loud voice: "Now, I have sent for you to offer you the position of private secretary for three months at two hundred dollars a month."

I had taken my rooms and organized my business to gain my independence, and to be free from working for just one

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

man. This would confine me entirely to Mr. Bellars. I thought of Mr. Falsworth, and how he would feel on his return. To be with Senator Bellars would be a protection to me—would be a protection to us both. As I hesitated, the thought of how Will would look when he came in and found me gone up-stairs flashed over my mind, and I refused Senator Bellars's offer. He didn't urge me. He never urged anybody. He was a leader; he just pointed the way and the means and went on; the others could do as they liked.

Before I left the room the other gentleman had left his chair and stood near us by the table. He was fully six feet tall, and very thin and bowed at the shoulders. It was a hot day, and he wore a white flannel suit and a red tie. His face was burned very brown, and he had a dark beard and thick, straight hair. His face was slender and his eyes were big and dark. I noticed his hand as he stood playing with a paper-cutter as Senator Bellars talked with me. It was a thin, brown hand, and, like the rest of him, very nervous. He wore a dark seal ring. Senator Bellars didn't speak to him, but when I went out I knew it was Mr. Kirkland, and that he had decided to take his uncle's advice and come on over to New York.

CHAPTER V



THE next time I saw Mr. Kirkland was when he came into my office, a few weeks later, with some work, and he stayed for a while talking to Miss Long and complimenting the view from our windows. "It would make a splendid room for a studio," he said. Mr. Kirkland smoked a long, black cigarette. I had never seen one before; they are Italian or Swiss make. After that I never saw him without one in his mouth or his hand. Those long, thin, black cigarettes are as much a part of Stephen Kirkland to me now as his thick, straight hair and his thin, brown face. He interested me as he talked there with Miss Long, though I felt it was a kind of disloyalty to know as much about him as I did—a sort of professional disloyalty; just the same it made me feel real mad with his uncle, when I remembered what I had written about "drink and cards and women!" While I remembered these things, Mr. Kirkland was talking with Miss Long, and I noticed that he had a kind laugh, like a boy's, and was the most mannered man I ever saw—real old-fashioned polite. He spoke to my typewriter as though she were a friend of his on whom he was making a society call, holding his long cigarette in his hand and not smoking, just out of politeness. I noticed, too, that his hair was a little gray at the temples, and he was awfully slender. It was keeping on hot, and this day he had on flannel

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

clothes and carried an old and very dirty straw hat under his arm—his shoes weren't polished like Will's.

Mr. Kirkland strolled to the big window as though there was nobody but himself in the office, and, smiling and smoking, he looked out as though he were studying the view. Then he said to me—I noticed especially it wasn't to Miss Long:

"Imperial spires and terraced roofs, broad bay and hospitable sea—what are they going to make of it all, Miss Carey?"

I told him I heard that they were going to tear down the house next to us and build an office building eighteen stories high.

"Perfectly horrible!" he exclaimed, laughing. "Too, too horrible! If they could tear *us* all down, now, and build *us* up, why, that might be worth while."

Then he went out, and Miss Long said:

"Oh, *isn't* he perfectly charming, Miss Carey? So handsome, and so *queer*! I guess he's travelled a great deal, don't you? He looks as though he spoke French."

Miss Long couldn't read his handwriting, and I had to take his work home and do it myself out at Brackettsville on my other machine. It was awfully bad copy, for there were a lot of French words running through; but I had a French dictionary and looked them up, and got some right and left blanks for the others. The paper was an essay called "The Psychics of Art." Mr. Kirkland called for it next day when the girls were out for lunch, and I knew there was something wrong with him the minute he came in. He was as pale as death, and his eyes as red as his cravat.

Mr. Kirkland wasn't the first man I had come across under the influence of liquor, but the others had only dis-

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

gusted me, whereas I felt sorry for this one. He was able to talk, though his voice was excited, and, as he had done before, he went over and stood in the window and began to go on about the view. Standing there, he gave me a little talk like a lecture on "The Psychics of Art." It was lovely. I understood it every bit, and I didn't dare interrupt or ask him to go because I was afraid he would change his mood and be disagreeable. It happened to be a quiet time, no one coming in, and when he had finished he went over and drank two glasses of ice-water.

"I've never had a better audience, Miss Carey, and yet I have lectured before some of the 'Faubourg' St. Germain in Paris."

I hoped he wasn't going up to his uncle like he was. It wasn't any of my business; still, somehow, I didn't want him to go, and it was a relief when he stopped on the door-sill and turned to me.

"I'd like to take a walk, and I'd like you to go with me. Maiden," he asked, just like out of a book, "will you be my staff?"

I put on my hat, and, without thinking twice, went out with Mr. Kirkland. It was the hour when the Wall Street men are at lunch, and the clerks and the girls coming in; I met several I knew, but I was a little behind Mr. Kirkland, and no one thought anything about us, anyhow. When we got into the street he led the way, and we went to the Battery.

I would rather not have gone that direction, but I didn't say anything, and when Mr. Kirkland staggered I caught his arm and gave him his balance. Then he took my arm and walked so, though I was quite a little shorter than he. Down to Castle Garden we went, just as I had gone before

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

with Will, only it was as different as night and day. As I look back I cannot think how I ever came to go! He was talking all the time about "Madonna eyes" and stars and poetry, and he recited a verse or two every now and then. I never heard a man like this when he was intoxicated. There was nothing disgusting about it; but by the time we got down to Bowling Green Park he could hardly stand, and I made him sit down on a bench, and, as I had done with Will Falsworth, I sat down by Mr. Kirkland's side. He had a beautiful smile. It was really the best of the good-looking things about him. Then he said to me:

"Were these the ways of life to thee
That led thee from the fragrant dell . . . ?"

He asked me this question so many times that I learned the two lines by heart.

"There's a very good idea for a poem there," he stammered. "I shall call you Penelope. You seem to me to have been formed to sit and spin—to weave and spin against fate."

He asked me if I knew anything about Penelope.

"I shall give you the Odyssey to-morrow. To-morrow—and to-morrow—and to-morrow."

After a little I saw that he was going to sleep. I kept thinking all the time of Senator Bellars and of his letter to Mr. Kirkland, and what the result would be if he should see his nephew in this state. I felt awfully sorry for him. It was dreadfully hot, but our seat was in the shade. When he couldn't sit up any longer he leaned on my shoulder and I let him, and when he had gone off sound asleep I made him as comfortable as I could and held the umbrella over him for a long time. No one bothered us. It's funny how

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

little any one matters to the folks around unless they give trouble! I couldn't help but smile when I thought how different this spree of mine was from the other. Mr. Falsworth seemed so strong and Mr. Kirkland seemed so weak.

Will had written me two or three times a day ever since he left New York and sent me a pile of telegrams. Of course, I hadn't written one word to him.

I didn't mean that Mr. Kirkland should wake up and find me there, for I was sure he would rouse sober and be able to look after himself. So I got him finally laid down on the bench and covered his face with his hat, and then went away and sat over where it was easy to see him wake up, which he did about four o'clock, dazed and looking all around in surprise, and stretching out his arms. He was all right, that was plain, and I got a sandwich and a glass of milk in the German restaurant, and returned to the office in time to close up.

CHAPTER VI



I makes things easier in your work if you are your own mistress, and nobody had a right to ask me a question. The girls told me Mr. Falsworth had been in, and on my machine was a note in pencil from him; but I didn't read it. I kept it until I got out home and was in my room alone. Will always made me a little afraid, he seemed so strong and so set on what he wanted. His letters and his telegrams were like fire; and when I threw them into the kitchen stove they curled round like they would burn the flames instead of being burned!

On my machine the next day was a bunch of flowers. I got in early before the girls and put them in water, and Will came later. We shook hands, and I didn't know how glad I'd be to see him until he stood there so bright in his blue serge clothes, in his fresh linen, and his face shining happiness and joy. He hurt my hand so that it ached for a long time afterward. I often thought it was very funny that nobody said or breathed a word against me, or that the girls themselves didn't think a thing; but it is true—no one ever did.

At the doorway out in the hall I said to Will:

"You mustn't give me any more flowers. It's against my rules."

"Why, I didn't send you any flowers. I wouldn't have

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

dared to send them here." And his whole face changed. "Who the devil did, though?" And he gripped my arm. "I have been gone ten mortal weeks, and you have never written me a line or a word. Now, if this is a case of *man*, Esther, I'm likely to make short work of him right here in this building."

I must have turned white and looked very angry, for he stopped and laughed. "There, there, that's all right, little girl. Go back in or somebody will see us. But this shows you how I feel."

I couldn't tell him then how he made *me* feel, for I had to go back and write for hours on a contract for the buying up of wheat-fields in some Western State. I never looked once over to the flowers in my ice-water glass.

After a while Miss Long said: "It's so hot in here, Miss Carey, and the lilies smell so awfully strong."

I told her to throw them out if she liked. But she stood them on the window-sill instead, and it made me feel as if I were taking advantage of a poor weak thing that couldn't speak for itself when they put the lilies out-of-doors.

I took a letter about then for Senator Bellars, and he was as cold and distant to me as if he had never seen me before. But I did my work for him the best I could with especial care, and his work interested me more even than Will's business letters and contracts. He dictated another letter to his sister in San Francisco:

"Stephen has decided to pick up here. He is in my office for the present; we'll see how it turns out. I have already given him the charge of important matters, and his handling of them is masterly. He's got something of the same kind of mind that I have, only my mind is fixed on tight, and

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

Stephen's turns on a pivot. He's got twice my education and talent, but he lacks a compass, and will be a hopeless derelict if he doesn't find his chart pretty quick. They haven't brought him home drunk *yet*, though, and I hear no tales against him. For his mother's sake I'll be as patient as I can, and if Stephen continues steady and stands by me he will be invaluable in the next campaign. He can get anywhere he likes if he has the grit and the control. Of course, he's no painter! He is really a born politician with a screw loose. Now the question is, '*Can he tighten up that screw?*' I hope so. The thing he needs right here is the right woman. It's hard to think of any one who would be fool enough to undertake the job. She'll have to be rich, for his tastes are luxurious. She ought to be in the social swim to pull him along with her. He goes out a great deal. He is very popular and continually with the Gandervelts, and I wish that Portia would marry him. I shall further it, of course."

CHAPTER VII



THE next week, Sunday was one of those awfully hot days, and I got up early to go out and breathe. Night was the only time I had to see about my own affairs, and sometimes I couldn't sleep, thinking about them and thinking about Will. I walked down to the pond this morning early, before the sun got red-hot. It was lovely at eight o'clock, and I sat there and thought how queer it was that Will Falsworth should just happen to be married. I knew that it was all very, very wrong.

I got rested in the nice air, and by-and-by climbed down into the old scow and pushed out to pick some water-lilies to fetch home.

I remember very well what I had on that day—a plain blue wash-dress, with a blue belt, and it was fresh and fitted me.

As I started home, Fanny was coming along the path to find me, and she met me at the corner of the street.

"Say, Esther," she said, as soon as we met, "you've got a caller."

My heart beat, for I was sure it was Will Falsworth, and I was awfully frightened.

"Who is it?"

"I don't know, but he's awfully stylish. He's sitting on the porch with the boys."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

And there they were all sitting around rocking and talking—Mr. Kirkland and the little boys. Mr. Kirkland was perfectly at home. I introduced him to Fanny. He looked tired out, his linen wasn't very tidy, his hair was too long, his beard wasn't trimmed, and his old clothes needed all kinds of care.

"I've been telling these boys about Ulysses, Miss Carey. We were just coming out of the Cyclops' cave, the lot of us." The boys were shy, and not used to having stories told them. "And you can go on with the adventure after you have read this."

He gave me a book—it was the *Odyssey*, and, though he didn't say a word, I understood that he remembered about our own queer adventure.

Fanny took it for granted that Mr. Kirkland was calling on me, so she went and sat down on the porch steps, and the boys played baseball near us in the vacant lot. He lit his long, black cigarette, and smoked and rocked in the green rocker while I sat in another with the lilies across my knees. I can smell them now, and smell his black cigarette. I was waiting for him to speak of the work he had brought.

"I like it out here immensely," he said, and looked around at what he could see of Brackettsville from our piazza. "It's so remote—so unique."

There were twenty houses like ours in the same street. At the end of the street was Farmer's Pond, where I had been that morning, and a little bit of woods, but he couldn't see those. Everybody was out on the front steps or in the yard, it was so fearfully hot, and I didn't think it was a bit "remote."

"There's something about it," he went on, "that brings me peace."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

He asked me about the population and the climate, and then smoked for a little while. I didn't know what to say. I must have been wondering why he had come out, when he asked me:

"What are you thinking of, Madonna of the lilies?"

And when I said I was wondering if he had brought me extra work to do, he laughed out loud.

"*Work!* Does Labor pursue us even to this garden—to this temple—to this Elysium?"

He took a fresh cigarette and lit that, while the other was still going, and threw the old one down and stamped it out. It looked dreadfully untidy on the piazza, but I didn't say anything.

"You think I am a little crazy, don't you, Miss Carey?"

"No, not at all."

"Come, now, what *do* you think? Tell me."

He hadn't the least idea how timid I was or how embarrassed—how, knowing all I did about him, it seemed too strange for anything to have him sit there, smiling and going on.

"Come, what do you think?"

"I think you're joking."

"Never mind—never mind. I won't bother you about it. Only, I am not joking; crazy, perhaps, and all the rest, but I'm the most deadly serious person you ever saw, my dear girl."

Although he called me these queer names, his manners were delightful. He had a way of bowing like a king.

"I would like to live here in this wilderness, Miss Carey—have a tent here and dream."

I said Brackettsville didn't seem much like a wilderness

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

to me—it was too hot and noisy; and Mr. Kirkland replied that the term was relative.

“The mid-Sahara is full of voices, and *there is no greater wilderness than the human heart.*”

Then he asked about each of the boys, and where they went to school, how old they were, and what they wanted to do. I told him as soon as they had finished the public school we would get them work in New York.

“One of them—Tommy, I think—wants to go to West Point.”

My smile was a little sour then.

“And the others want to be kings,” I said, “don’t they?”

Mr. Kirkland looked reproachfully at me. “Well, they didn’t tell me so.”

He had spread one of his hands on the arm of the big green rocker. It was a broad, flat rest, where the boys used to cut things in deep with their knives and soft pencils. After a second he lifted up his hand, and, as he looked down at the palm, he said:

“By jove, *that’s* a queer thing!” And he held his palm out flat to me. There was a name written across the palm as clear as clear.

“Could you get a little hand-glass, Miss Carey? Do.”

I gave him the pocket-glass out of my purse that was in the hallway on the rack, and he read the name written across his hand: “Esther Merle Carey.”

I blushed like fire. “The boys wrote it—they write over everything. Won’t you come in and wash it off?”

He looked at it a long time.

“Curious—curious beyond words! Now, if I had never seen you, it would have been more romantic still!”

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

He refused to wash it off or wipe it off—just laughed, looking down from time to time, and said, at length:

“But that’s not a boy’s writing, Miss Carey.”

It was Will Falsworth’s. When he came out once to Brackettsville, on a Sunday, I had gone in to town with Tommy to the dentist’s and didn’t see him, and there, as he waited on the piazza, he must have scribbled my name. It was very queer to see it written across Mr. Kirkland’s hand, all stained with tobacco.

I reminded him about the work, and he answered:

“Yes, I brought you out a lot of work, but I won’t give it to you to-day.”

I told him that my machine was here, and that I could do it at once.

“I’m not sure that I will give it to you at all, or that it is worth while.”

I saw that he was still joking, and I sat looking out over the yard where the boys were yelling “First base!” “Low ball!” and “Foul!” I hoped he would go before dinner, for I would have been ashamed to have him stay. I was glad he hadn’t spoken of our walk; it was very sensible of him to just refer to it in a pleasant, easy way with the flowers and the book he had brought me. As I was thinking of this and hoping he would go, I saw some one coming down the street from the railway station. It was Will Falsworth. For a moment I was scared to death. It seemed to me that I would freeze, for, hot as it was, I grew cold, and I couldn’t move hand or foot until Mr. Falsworth came up the steps straight to where we sat rocking. I didn’t have to introduce them—they knew each other. Mr. Kirkland got up as polite and as smiling and as gentlemanly, and Will nodded to him and was dreadfully rude,

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

and I never felt so small and stupid as I did between them.

Mr. Kirkland offered one of his queer cigarettes, and Will laughed harshly and refused.

"No foreign stuff for *me*, thanks." He leaned back on the porch-rail as white as a ghost.

Fanny came up just then, and the boys, too, hot and dusty, and asked if they couldn't have some lemonade, and I was going in to make it for them when Mr. Kirkland said good-bye. He left cheerful and pleasant, and the little boys went down to the gate with him. When he had really gone, Will said to me:

"Let your sister go in and make the lemonade, and you stay out here with me."

I was glad to see him even if he had been mad and rude. He looked so cool and clean.

"Find your hat, Esther, and let's get out of this infernal street with its clatter, and go down to the pond." And it made me smile to think our front porch wasn't remote enough or wilderness enough for Will.

No one was around when we got down to the water, and we sat by the edge over near the woods, and I kept off the mosquitoes with Will's hat.

"What was that man here for, Esther?"

"He came to bring me out some work."

"I don't believe it. A man like Kirkland doesn't carry copy to his stenographer."

"Well, you don't suppose he came to call on me, do you?"

"Just that, and he mustn't come here again."

I spoke, thinking out my words, for it was always hard for me to talk.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"What do you suppose he thought, seeing you here, Will?"

"I was going to say that I didn't care what he thought, Esther, but that wouldn't be true."

"You didn't act that way."

"No, I did not, and if I come across Kirkland with you, I'm not likely to leave him in ignorance of how I feel. He would compromise any decent woman he was seen with. Do you know what kind of a man he is?" (I knew better than Will did.) "He's a drunken brute, a rake, and a gambler."

His attack on Mr. Kirkland made me angry.

"I don't see so much of you, Will, that it is worth while to talk of another man and run him down."

"There," he cried, "stand up for him; that puts the finish to it, Esther! I don't run him down; he has run himself down into the gutter long ago."

I asked him to tell me something about his Western trip, and then he turned to me and begged my pardon for his crossness, and, when he finished talking to me, he said:

"That drunken chap is free to marry you, and it makes me crazy to see another man near you. No man could see you in that blue dress with those lilies in your lap and not be wild about you. You don't know what a woman you are, Esther!"

I know that Will thought a lot of foolish stuff, and I was troubled more than ever that day as to what was going to happen to me if he kept on, for when I was with him I forgot everything else, or that there was any reason why I couldn't go away with him, as he said, to some other country and let him give me pretty things.

CHAPTER VIII



SENATOR BELLARS was most of the time in Washington, and Mr. Kirkland had charge of the New York office. We were awfully rushed that summer, and I went a great deal to court to take evidence for Mr. Falsworth, and Mr. Kirkland brought us in all his literary work to do. The girls were crazy about him, he was so kind and pleasant, and always making curious remarks. He talked like a book, and, if he hadn't been so kind, you would have thought he was making fun of everybody. He kept sending me books one after another, and I read them on the ferry and in the train. I never knew how fond I was of reading till then. Mr. Kirkland chose exactly the kind I liked; they seemed real. The first one he gave me was new at the time—*Anna Karénina*. I had read Dickens and Scott, but this was the first modern novel I had found time to read. One day I was going along Chambers Street to the ferry, too early for my train, and Mr. Kirkland came up and walked by my side.

"Did you read the *Odyssey*?"

"Yes. I liked it very much."

"Did you see your resemblance, Penelope?"

I said that I had not.

"I would like to paint it. I'd like to paint the picture of you in Brackettsville—in the wilderness—only they tell me

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

I'm a very poor painter. I've given up art—that is, painting, at any rate. What do you think of Anna Karénina?"

I told him that she was a real woman and that I liked her, and I didn't understand things that were only pictures—nothing more.

"That novel is like a great thunder-storm," he said. "It clears the air, and yet it stirs the emotions."

"I don't think," I said to Mr. Kirkland, "that it paid."

"Didn't pay to write?"

And I said, "No, for Anna to do what she did."

He smiled very broadly and looked real pleased, and said:

"Of course not. But a little philosophy would be fatal to any real love-affair."

He walked with me all the way to the ferry, and crossed on it with me all the way to my train. We watched the sunset from the front of the boat, and he told me about Europe, and how cool it is over there in summer, and how pretty.

"But I shouldn't be surprised if I never saw the Old World again, Miss Carey."

And I told him that he seemed so foreign it was hard to believe that he wouldn't go back.

"I've been caught in the spoke of a great wheel, and it is flinging me hard. It may break me or it may fling me somewhere where I'll stick and stay, but eventually *I shall stick here.*" He meant the United States.

When we got to my train he stopped until it went out. He still wore the same old flannel clothes, but he waited there, his hat in his hand, smiling at me and bowing to me so politely that he looked more like a count, I thought, than an American business man. I found out that he had slipped a big basket of peaches on the train for the little boys. The next day he went out to Brackettsville and took the little

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

boys "up creek" fishing, and they ate the peaches and were awfully sick that night. They were crazy about him.

And I felt sorry for him.

He came in a few days afterward, just as I was closing up the office. Senator Bellars was in New York attending a directors' meeting, and I had been writing up in his office that afternoon.

"Would you be so good as to come up again at once?" Mr. Kirkland asked me. "My uncle wants to see you."

But when I had followed him out as far as the elevator he stopped me.

"Don't go up." And he stared at me strangely. His eyes were like the pictures of a man in torture. "My uncle doesn't want you. I do."

I honestly thought he was crazy, especially when he put his hand on me with the same kind of grip that Will Falsworth had done.

"I want to ask you to come with me—to come out and walk with me. Don't refuse."

He shook me a little. He didn't make any excuse or any threat; but I was perfectly sure if I didn't go, it was all up with him. I had my hat on—I was all ready to leave the building.

"All right," I answered. And we went right down in the elevator to the street.

It was after six o'clock. I don't know what he thought I was made of. I guess he never thought about me at all, except as a sort of flesh-and-blood staff or cane. We started up Broadway, cut through to the west, and walked up through Sixth Avenue to Fifty-ninth Street, and crossed to the Park. It was hot and dusty. A man was selling lemonade at the gate. Mr. Kirkland hadn't said one word.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

I asked him if he wouldn't have some lemonade, and he stared back at me and said, under his breath, "*My God!*"—nothing more. He drank four glasses of lemonade, and then we walked on. The Park was quite full, the children were skipping ropes and rolling hoops, and he stopped and looked at them, smiling. I could see that he liked children. He didn't notice anything else. We walked to Seventy-second Street, through to Fifth Avenue. I was a very strong girl, but I had gotten up that day at six to do things in the house and take my early train, and I had worked all day. I could see that his face was set, but it didn't seem white; it seemed black, as if it had been forged out of iron. "It's far worse for him than for me," I thought, and it kept me up. My legs soon got just like cotton and my feet like air-cushions, and by the time night really came I actually don't know where we went.

By-and-by we got in a stage and rode. Then we got in a car, and by-and-by he was putting me on my train over in Hoboken and waiting just as he had waited that other night. *And he was smiling again.* His face had sort of broken up and softened, and I could see that the horror had passed, for the time at least, and I was so glad! I fell asleep on the train. The conductor knew me, and woke me up at Brackettsville. I took a hack home, and it was past one o'clock when I got in the house.

CHAPTER IX



WILL was writing me all the time. I had little opportunity to see anybody. I wouldn't let him come out to Brackettsville, and I wouldn't see him anywhere but in the office. If I was busy he would stay on until I was free, and it used to make me so wild and nervous that I didn't know what to do, and Miss Long and Miss Frame began to notice. Miss Long had broken off with her young man, and had time to be jealous and suspicious of everybody. At last, in order to put a stop to things, I said that I would go with him to the Park and Museum on Saturday afternoon. He met me up on Madison Avenue, and was waiting at the curb as I got off the car. He had a hansom-cab waiting, and I couldn't but think of the difference between this excursion to the Park and the other. Will had lovely flowers for me; they were so sweet and dainty. I shall never forget that Saturday afternoon as long as I live.

Some things stand out in a woman's life as if they were magic things, and no matter how long she lives or what kind of a life she leads those things are the same until she is old. There must be witchcraft in them, I think, to fasten so to the mind—they seem to keep their colors and their perfume, and to be alive when all the rest is dead. I can see the grass now, all covered with sheep, and how the trees shone in the sunlight, and the bright people in their

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

summer clothes, and how the road ran out as our hansom drove over it. It was my first ride in the Park. I can see Will, so big and strong and so good-looking, with a little rose from my bouquet in his buttonhole. He never smoked when he was with me, although he was devoted to it. He said he "never smoked with a woman he liked." He needed all his time for her.

He told me that he had made his plans to leave New York for good, and to live out near his mines. He wanted me to go with him the next week, and to meet him at the Grand Central Station on Thursday. "Minnie could get a divorce," Will said, and that she would be "glad to do it," for she never cared for him anyway, and his "life was hell with her." Then we would be married, and I could have the boys out there with me and could look out for them. Will talked about this perfectly beautifully; he said we had "a right to our own lives," both of us: that I had been a slave ever since I was fifteen, and he was going to set me free. He told me he would make a wonderful success there with me to help him—"to comfort him." He repeated that sentence a dozen times. He said there wasn't anything in his love for me but such as a man could have for his wife and the mother of his children.

I didn't say anything.

We got into the Museum just before it closed, and walked around among the statues and the pictures, but I couldn't take them in very well. It wasn't easy to think of art with Will bending over me all the time. I didn't think of Fanny or the little boys, or duty, or mother or father, or right or wrong.

"Minnie isn't a human woman or wife, Esther. How can a charity enthusiast living on Fifth Avenue know what a *live man needs*?"

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

Will had asked me to wear the blue dress, and I had done so. By-and-by we came up to a certain picture Will was trying to find.

"There," he nodded (it was the only picture he had mentioned or that he had seen at all) — "there, Esther, *that's* the ideal thing—that is the whole game!"

It was a picture of a soldier in the old days, coming home from the wars. He was covered with laurels, and he carried a lot of wreaths on his arms; but he was wounded, and a woman was close to his left side. He was leaning against her—her arms were around him.

"There she is," Will Falsworth said, "and you see how he brings her everything—his victories and his defeats."

It was curious, but the picture made me think for a second, not of Will or what he was saying, but of the night I had walked out of the Park entrance, Mr. Kirkland leaning on my shoulder with his heavy hand; but I didn't think of him long, for Will led me on, and by the time he had put me in the hack at the Brackettsville station—for he never left me until I got out home—by that time I had promised to go with him in less than a week.

CHAPTER X



THE next day at the office I heard that Mr. Kirkland had gone to Washington. In that week I wrote up-stairs for Senator Bellars. Sometimes I thought I had no right to be sitting there like that, and letting him trust me with his important affairs. Then I decided that business was business and his work was safe with me, and he had nothing to do with my life, anyhow. He was dictating some speeches that he was going to make out West on a political tour. They were splendid. I was glad to take them. It helped me to keep from thinking. I couldn't look at Miss Long and Miss Frame half the time, and whenever I did they seemed to reproach me. Each morning I said, "Well, I am going to tidy up the office work to-day, anyhow," and I'd put it off until the next day each time. Things were kept pretty well balanced, though; for I was very particular about it. There were only a few outstanding bills, and our credit was good.

Will kept his word about not coming into the office or writing me, and I liked him better and better for it, and whenever I had a minute to think I wished he would come in—and then the idea of him scared me so that I trembled at my machine. I went up Wednesday for the last dictation from the Senator. He said the work was excellent, and, as he had done before, he gave me a little extra check. I

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

refused it firmly this time. First of all I said to him I hadn't earned it; then, secondly, I'd been overpaid for the work, since it interested me.

He put down the paper he was holding and looked at me, and I think he saw me then for the first time. He repeated:

"*Interested you?* You mean to tell me that you followed the matter of the work? Why, I thought you were a machine!"

I said that I couldn't help reading as I wrote, and when I had said this I was afraid I had been impertinent, for his face changed, and it made me glad I wasn't going to do typewriting any more. After to-morrow I could read his speeches and think what I liked.

"I thought you had the good fortune to be an ignorant woman," he grunted.

"I am ignorant, but I didn't think any one thought it was good fortune."

"Why, it's fatal," he continued, "for a woman to know more than to cook food for those under her roof."

I don't know how I dared to answer him, but I did.

"If I hadn't known a *little* more than that, sir, there wouldn't have been any food under our roof to cook!"

He said: "Nonsense. Some man would have come along and brought it in a paper bag, and the woman would have been kept feminine and normal; a woman should be an ignorant machine to be a successful factor in the scheme of life."

This was Wednesday night.

I went to bed for the last time at home. I was to meet Will at four o'clock the next day at the Grand Central.

I didn't go.

At four o'clock I sat working at my machine, and my head

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

ached so I couldn't see the keys. Miss Long had gone to Senator Bellars to tell him that I was busy, and I sent Miss Frame to collect some bills outside. I was positive Will would come directly to the office. I would have to bear it alone. I could hear his step all the way down the hall on near to a run. He slammed the door so the glass shook, and the letters, "Miss Esther Carey, Law Stenographer," seemed to dance. I must have read it upside down a hundred times that hour. Will threw his stick and gloves down on a chair, and didn't take off his hat; he was as pale as death.

"So you have cut loose, have you?"

His eyes seemed to be on fire.

"Will, I couldn't come."

"Why not?"

"Because it's not right!"

He laughed dreadfully.

"Oh, that's a good one! Not right? It's all right to treat me to this, I suppose."

My mouth was as dry as sawdust and my lips like straw. He had never been rough to me or rude.

"Now, look here." He was more quiet. "You don't want to drive me to hell, do you, little girl?"

And I answered: "That's just where I would drive you if we did this."

"You will, if you don't, Esther."

I must have looked so set and hard at him that he lost hope at the start; but he argued and urged, and talked and begged, and I clasped my hands in my lap and kept saying over and over to myself, "It isn't right—it isn't right."

Will got wild at last, and jumped up.

"Very well!" he cried. "If you're so good as all this,

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

you'll have to take the consequences. I won't live without you."

I begged him to go home and get rested, and to quiet down and not to be crazy like this. We would talk it over. Somebody would come in, I told him.

He looked at me in a way I shall never forget. Then he kissed me, and walked over to the window and sort of huddled there. As we stood there like this, both of us so miserable, the door opened, and in came Mr. Kirkland, looking startled.

"I thought I heard you call, Miss Carey," he said, and afterward I thought how strange a thing it was to say. Then he saw Will in the window. Mr. Kirkland had come from Washington, and his bag was in his hand. "Is this man annoying you?" he asked me, in a perfectly awful voice.

"Oh, no—no," I said, but I must have looked queer enough.

"I don't believe you."

I told him it was all right, and to please go and leave us.

"No," he said, in the same impressive voice, "not until your companion goes."

Will turned around then; he had been crying, but he was so angry at Mr. Kirkland that it gave him spunk and nerve.

"Miss Carey's 'companion' will go when he gets ready, and he doesn't need a drunken reprobate to send him, either."

Mr. Kirkland didn't answer him. "I shall wait outside, Miss Carey, while you talk with your friend, unless you ask me to stay, which I am quite ready to do." But I begged him to go, and he went out. Then Will said to me:

"You've given me my walking-papers for that low reprobate! That's what it is. I am going now. I won't

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

trouble you any more, Esther, but I tell you to look out for him. Some day I will kill him."

I was trembling so and so faint that I couldn't find any words to say, and I didn't want Will to see how I felt or how it hurt me to see him go like that—or what it was to me to see him go like that. I just let him go, and I sat down again at my machine, cold like ice. I didn't speak to Will or say good-bye, but he stood a moment there by me, staring down, his face marked with anger and tears; then he picked up his cane and gloves, and I heard him go down the hall to the elevator. His step didn't stop, so I knew he hadn't met Mr. Kirkland on the way.

CHAPTER XI



MY nerves gave way after this, and about the 15th of August I took a vacation. I went to a place called Mohawk, in the Catskill Mountains, and took Tommy with me. He had been going to work for a week only, and he was awfully tall and thin. I had never been alone with any of the boys before, and it seemed queer at first. But it was lovely out there on the lake, so cool, and my windows faced the lake and the hills and the sky, and there wasn't a sound but the birds and the water. Tommy had a perfectly elegant time rowing and fishing and swimming, and he got real brown, and almost fat for him. He used to row me out in the evening in the moonlight. I liked Tommy best of all in the family because he was brighter and better looking. He found some boys to go around with, too, and I was a great deal alone, but I liked it.

After a few days a book came for me from New York. It was *Richard Feverel*. I read it sitting there in the piney woods, leaning against a tree. Some books came for Tommy too, and we had plenty to keep busy with. Everything about Mohawk Lake for me is connected with Mr. Falsworth and Tommy. I went up with that trouble, and I tried to leave it there. I carried it around with me on the lake and in the woods like a big parcel that one can't pos-

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

sibly carry much farther, and yet which one doesn't want to lose. I don't know where I laid it down, after all.

There was a little excursion that everybody made, back of the hotel, up to the top of Pine Hill, where they said you saw a beautiful view. Every day, nearly, Tommy would tease me to go and climb. But every day and each time it was lower down the mountain Tommy's breath gave out, and we never got to the top. He didn't like to give in, though—he was a proud little fellow, and I could see he was ashamed. I felt sorry for him when he said:

"The fellows say you can see four States from Pine Hill, Sis—it's a mean shame!"

Just the same, when we came home from Mohawk Lake, Tommy's face was round and fat and he looked well, and started right in to work. I brought back a picture of Lake Mohawk, and pinned it on my wall. It was a small photo of the hotel, with the lake and the mountains black around it. It looked deep and quiet and awfully remote. It was my idea of a real wilderness.

Mr. Kirkland had stayed down in Washington all summer, but he sent me up magazines and books from there, and wrote me about them, asking me how I liked so-and-so, and "What do you think of so-and-so?" He never sent me anything but real stories, and by-and-by they got to be a part of my daily life, and I used to see things and people through these books, and think about Hester Prynne and Dorothea and Rosamond Vinci, and I used to think it made things easier to understand when you watch the way they work out.

Mr. Kirkland was secretary to his uncle then, and seemed to be giving satisfaction. His letters were full of funny things and doings down there in Washington. He never

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

seemed to care a bit that I didn't write. Once I read in the paper that he was up in Newport with the Gandervelts over Sunday, and I knew that his uncle would be pleased.

One Sunday afternoon in late October—a cold, bright afternoon—I was taking a walk with Tommy down by Farmer's Pond. The leaves had turned red, and it looked bright and pretty like a little scarlet dell. Tommy and I walked round the pond a couple of times before supper. I didn't think he was very well. He seemed to get thinner and older-looking every day. One-third around we met Mr. Kirkland slowly strolling toward us. He had on a new fall suit, and a soft, brown felt hat and a nice tie. He looked perfectly fine, but it seemed as though he had grown taller and more stooping and thinner than ever. He carried a book in his hand. He was laughing and pleasant as usual, and acted glad to see us.

He asked Tommy if he were taking the West Point examinations yet, and Tommy said no, that he was working in a New York office.

"You run home, Tom, and let me scold your sister. She doesn't know how the United States Army needs men."

Then he told me that Tommy didn't look well or strong, and I answered that none of us "looked much at any time."

"Except you, Miss Esther. *You* look a great deal! What have you been doing to grow so disappointingly handsome?"

I couldn't help but laugh.

"Well, nobody ever called me *that*, anyway."

Then he went on: "If a woman lives long enough she'll find some man to admire each one of her traits and features, until, in the end, she discovers she is a complete Venus.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

One fellow will hang himself for her lips; another will commit crime for her hand; another will tell her that her eyes can save him, and so on."

He opened the book he held. "Here," he said, "is something written by a giant," and he read out loud to me as we walked along, "The Garden of Proserpine":

"Here, where the world is quiet,
Here, where all trouble seems
Dead winds' and spent waves' riot
In doubtful dreams of dreams;
I watch the green fields growing
For reaping folk and sowing,
For harvest-time and mowing,
A sleepy world of streams."

I said I thought it was very pretty, when he had finished.

"You use the wrong term, Miss Carey. Don't you see any difference between your own exquisite little dress and this verse I have been reading?"

"Of course, a great deal."

"Now, for instance, you wouldn't call this scarlet wall of quivering foliage, this liquid-hearted corner of the woods, '*nice*,' would you?"

I said yes, that I thought it was very nice indeed.

"No, no, it's *divine*, and so is the verse. And yet," Mr. Kirkland said, "I am not proving my point, because your dress is the divinest of all."

I knew perfectly well that he was laughing at me more than ever. But it was pleasant to have him there talking about interesting things. He read me a lot of poems, one after another; they were like music there in the quiet woods. When we came back I was too timid to ask him to stay to

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

supper and just eat biscuits and salad. When he left me at the gate he said:

"I shall see you on the eight-o'clock express to-morrow, Miss Carey, for I have become a resident of Brackettsville, myself."

Fanny and the boys came down to the gate, and he went on to say:

"I'm boarding at the Huntley, down the street, and I have bought a suburban commutation."

CHAPTER XII



HE left the Swinburne and Shelley with me, and I read a good many of the poems that night. When he asked me which of them I liked the best it was hard to tell. But I told him that it was this one:

“Quickly walk o’er the Western sea
Spirit of night—”

I don’t know why, but it made me think of the port down at the Battery where I had stood to see the ships go out so slowly with happy people on board of them, but all of the verses were lovely, and it was hard to choose.

Mr. Kirkland boarded at the Huntley all that fall. Everybody liked him there. We heard that he gave large tips and joked with everybody, and was so polite to Mrs. Huntley that she said it was as good as having a king in the house to see him bow and hear him say, “Oh, I *beg* your pardon”; and the conductors on the trains and the ticket-seller and the hackmen liked him. He never walked, he always took a hack up to Mrs. Huntley’s, and always had some queer, odd thing to tell every one, and he always lifted his hat or touched it with a great deal of style. We went up and down on the trains together, and he called every Sunday afternoon and sat in the parlor with Fanny and me

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

and the boys, reading the papers or playing checkers with Tommy, and by-and-by our house got all perfumed through by his black cigarettes, and our parlor carpet had burned spots where he had dropped them lighted, and there was always lots of ashes when the girl swept. Fanny would put the ash-trays everywhere for him, but he never noticed them, just knocked his cigarette on the chair or anywhere and let the ashes fall.

Fanny thought he was stupid and silly. She didn't like him to call her by the queer names he did—"Salome," "Beatrice," and "Guinevere." She was always cross when he was around; but Tom and he grew better friends every day.

Mr. Kirkland talked so much about it that I made Tom give up his place and stay out home and loaf until he got stronger. Fanny thought that it was silly of me, and just an extravagant idea, and she didn't see "how we would manage." The little boys were going to boarding-school, and Tom's salary helped with the house. However, nothing seemed to do him any good. He just got weaker and thinner, and hung around, and only took interest when Mr. Kirkland came to call and talked to him and treated him as though he were a man.

He made me take Tom to a doctor, and, when we came back and Tommy went up-stairs to lie down, I had a lot of errands to do and walked to town to do the Sunday marketing; and I made some cake for supper. Nobody but Fanny was at home. The little boys were away, and I never talked much with Fanny.

Mr. Kirkland called in the evening. And as he got up to go he asked me what the doctor had said about Tom, and when I told him he looked down at me very kindly and asked:

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"Well, what will you do?"

"Just keep him right here."

I never liked his face so much. It seemed so good.

"Will you do me a favor, Miss Carey?"

"What is it?"

"Make believe it's *you* who are walking from Wall Street to Central Park, and *lean on me*. Let me help you, will you?"

I told him I thought we could get along all right, and that Tommy liked him better than anybody, and would always be glad to see him.

CHAPTER XIII



I was a long winter. It seemed as though the storms would never let up and that spring would never come. Tommy took to his bed and grew weaker every day. I went in to business regularly, and Fanny as well. The girl gave him all the care he needed. It wasn't much until toward the last. He was crazy about the things and books that Mr. Kirkland brought him. Mr. Kirkland came every evening and sat with us. When Tommy was able we sat up-stairs with him. Toward spring I only went to town the days Tommy was easier. Fanny stayed home, too, sometimes, but she was young and had a trick of humming tunes that made Tommy nervous, and, though she tried hard, she couldn't break the habit. Fanny was very pretty, and had lots of calls and friends. She spent all her salary, outside of her board-money, for her clothes, but it paid to dress her. After the first of April Tommy didn't pretend to sit up any more, and I remember getting out of bed early one morning with such a feeling of *hurry—hurry* on me. I dressed and went in to my brother's room. It was only eight o'clock, but he had got hold of the girl and made her fix him up and was sitting up in bed. He looked fine. His hair was brushed back and his eyes were quite bright.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"Say, sis, you can go in to town to-day all right. I'm feeling great. I guess I'll be up this week sure, if the weather keeps along."

It was warmer, and he had the windows open. One tree near the house was covered with apple blossoms.

I hadn't been in to town for a week, and the girls needed me. Things were every which way, and they were telephoning me until I was nearly crazy, so I thought he was lots better, and that I would run in for an hour. When I came to say good-bye to Tommy he was looking fine still. He was only sixteen. He had a little flannel jacket that I had made him, and he looked like a girl, with his pink cheeks and his smooth hair.

"Mr. Kirk's staying up to-day," Tommy said. "He is coming to show me how to draw a picture."

He had given Tom a big box of colors, and it seemed to me that perhaps, after all, Tom might really take a pull for the better and get well.

All the way to town I felt the *hurry*. I couldn't get through fast enough in the office. There was a mountain of work and directions to give, and I saw if I didn't come back to business soon there would be trouble. But I ate a bit of lunch and *hurried* home at four o'clock.

Senator Bellars passed me in the hall. I expected he would bow, but he didn't. I was surprised, but I was *hurrying* so fast that I didn't have time to notice or mind then. The ferry-boat waited in her slip so long I got wild. The train was late, and I could have screamed. At the station I took a hack and made Mr. Beam *hurry—hurry*. When I got to the house there was no sign of anybody. The girl met me on the stairs.

"Oh, Miss Esther, *hurry—hurry*," And I ran up.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

Mr. Kirkland was sitting on Tommy's bed. He had the boy in his arms. I went around to the other side, and we held him together.

I whispered across, "Where's the doctor?"

"He's just gone out into the back - country to a confinement case. He's been here and gone." Then he said aloud, "We don't need anybody, do we, old man?"

Tommy hadn't been able to speak very well for a long time. His voice had been hoarse for months, and it was because he had spoken out so well that morning and had seemed so strong that I had taken courage for him.

"Hold me up," he managed to say to Mr. Kirkland, "that's all. Hold—me—high—up."

We held him there like that till night. Tommy seemed to like us being there with him. His poor voice was so hoarse he couldn't speak, but once he said, "Mr. Kirk is all right—he's *all right*."

I don't know who came or went—there may have been twenty people—I don't remember. I only felt the thin body that lay against me like a feather stirred by a dying breath. Down at the foot of the bed was his paint-box and pad.

Mr. Kirkland said to me, "He was trying to paint you a picture of Mohawk"; and I said, "*Don't!*"

Tommy tried to say something—I couldn't make it out. Then he began to talk very fast and very low, as if he were hurrying.

"He says something about a *view*," Mr. Kirkland whispered, "and 'hurrying to the top.'"

I knew he was thinking of Pine Hill, and he was climbing—climbing. I held my brother on my breast, and he said, "Higher—higher," and looked at me to help him, and I

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

said to Mr. Kirkland, "He thinks he's climbing—lift him a little."

And, as though our arms lifting him brought him to the height, Tommy smiled as if he saw some lovely country, and the light never left his face when we laid him back on the pillow.

CHAPTER XIV



ABOUT a week after Tommy died Mr. Kirkland was sitting on our porch, and all of a sudden he leaned forward in his chair and said to me:

"Well, what are you going to do about it, Esther?"

I asked him what he meant.

He said, "*What are you going to do with me?*"

He knocked his cigarette ashes off on the chair-arm, where my name had come out written across his hand. I think I must have said, "There isn't anything for me to do, is there?" for he exclaimed, "Well, then, the whole thing is to go to pot, is it?" And he stared at me like a lion, then laughed in his old way. "I suppose you have heard some lively stories about me?"

I said I *had* heard a few.

"You don't know half the truth of them, my dear girl, but I shall tell them all to you," and, smiling and frowning together, and smoking like a chimney, right then and there he told me his life. Like Tommy, his mother had died when he was little, and he had brought himself up with plenty of money to ruin him. "Until last year," he said, "I hadn't been to sleep sober for a century." He repeated the words "until last year" very solemnly. "There isn't a pleasure that I envied that I didn't take, but since I came

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

out here this fall I haven't touched a drop of liquor or looked at a woman or at a game of cards. Do you know why?"

I said that I did not.

"By Jove," he cried, "I don't believe you do! Simple, modest, unselfish creature that you are, I don't believe you dream what your power is. Why, it's *for you*, my dear girl—for *your sake*. There's not a woman I have ever seen that could keep me sober for a week. But I've kept straight for eight months so that I could ask you—I mean so that I could tell you—I ask you nothing—nothing—but I tell you—" He looked at me quietly for a few moments and smoked. Then he sat for a long time, his cigarette between his fingers. When it went out he let it fall on the piazza. He patted the chair-arm. "Your name here, on this bit of wood, spread itself across my palm. There isn't a bit of me that your name isn't written upon." Then he said, slowly: "You look like the Madonna of the Consolation; you look as though you understood. Esther, you look as though you were going to—" He held out his hand to me, and I gave him mine. "Esther, Esther," he whispered, "*do you mean that you will see me through?*"

It was hard for me to speak. But I told him that I would if he needed me.

I didn't say anything about this to a soul. Anyway, there were only the little boys and Fanny, and she didn't like Mr. Kirkland. Of course, he was entirely dependent on his uncle, and he decided to wait for a while until he had made himself indispensable to Senator Bellars before he told him about his plans. Neither of us called it an engagement. He had such queer names for everything that an "engagement" would have sounded commonplace. Nothing changed in any way; he just came and sat and

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

talked and talked and sent books and candy. He was writing what he called a "prose drama," and he used to read it to me, smoking and waving his long, brown hands. He said there were "great lines" in it, and it had "the elements of a masterpiece." He said, too, that he "couldn't combine politics with art," and spoke of things as national disasters, and he thought there were a great many wrong things in Washington, and he used to rave against them in the parlor to Fanny and me—she never stayed long, though. She saw her callers in the dining-room. We could hear them giggle.

One night Mr. Kirkland said to me, "That sound is like the trickling of a fountain in a silver basin;" and I said, "It sounds just too silly for any use to me. I should think Fan would have more sense"; and he answered: "My dear girl, you wouldn't spoil a perfect creation, would you? Fanny is perfection."

And I couldn't help thinking that perhaps Fanny was the kind of woman his uncle had raved about.

Over and over again he used to say, when we were talking of Washington and of what he was doing:

"Oh, if I were only a *man*—only a *man*."

And when I told him, "You seem an awfully strong one to me," with a real pleased look he exclaimed:

"That is nice of you! Do I really seem so? Well, you couldn't have pleased me better than by saying it to me. It is a medal of honor—the first; but I am really only an idealist, and Brackettsville is a singular place for me to drift into."

He asked me a great many questions, but I never asked him any. I just let him talk, and by-and-by I gave up saying "*What do you mean?*" when I didn't understand, for it seemed to disappoint him, and I discovered if I waited long

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

enough I found out without. He told me I was an excellent audience.

I tried to take up sewing because he stayed so late; I was stupid at it, for I didn't even know how to hem, but he didn't want me to sew steadily, anyhow. He said he required my "undivided attention." "Sit with your hands folded and look divine, Esther." So I had to sit idle in the mahogany rocker and let him talk or read.

My business went along all right. Mr. Falsworth had moved his offices out of the building and had gone out West, and Minnie went to Europe. Senator Bellars went to Washington, and the summer after Tommy died things just drifted along.

CHAPTER XV



WHEN the girl brought me Senator Bellars's card out at Brackettsville it seemed as though I should faint if I went down-stairs. He was standing like a giant in the middle of the parlor, gazing out of the window.

"My miserable nephew tells me that he has had the audacity to ask you to marry him. How much truth is there in this unwarrantable nonsense?"

I replied that we were engaged, and he gave a little, short laugh.

"Superb! Superb! Engaged on nothing a year, and to his stenographer!" He changed his tone. "My dear Miss Carey, of course you know that this thing is *impossible!*"

He began to walk up and down between the windows and the dining-room door.

"You mean to tell me that Stephen has asked you to marry him? Why, you have no conception of what my nephew is! You know," he repeated—"you know that he is a pauper."

I answered that I understood Mr. Kirkland had no fortune.

"No fortune!" he cried; "why, he hasn't enough to pay his laundress! He is entirely dependent on me for his living and for his career. Do you realize that?"

"I know that you have been very kind to him, Senator Bellars."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"I have taken him out of the gutter for my own sake and for his mother's. Say the word, I'll drop him back to-morrow. But my nephew might have a brilliant career. He is a man of talent, and the world is open to him."

He stopped his walk and stared at me, pulling his long, bushy eyebrows over his eyes. "I expect Stephen to go *very far*."

He waited so long that I agreed:

"I think Mr. Kirkland will succeed."

Mr. Bellars snatched that word out of my mouth, and, with a cruel smile, said:

"He *won't* succeed if he drags himself down by a mistaken marriage." And went on more gently: "Let's be practical. Now, just what does all this mean?"

As I didn't answer, he exclaimed:

"You must understand that Stephen Kirkland can't marry you. I respect you for a good business woman and I am sure that you are a fine girl, but you are not the wife for my nephew."

"Mr. Kirkland seems to think so."

Senator Bellars threw his head back. "Great heavens! *Stephen* thinks so! He also thought at one time that a ballet-dancer at the French Opera was 'the star of his life.' He spent a *hundred thousand dollars* on her. Why didn't he marry *her*, I wonder? Oh, why didn't he marry one of his mistresses? Why? Why?"

He threw his head back again, and smiled at me brutally.

"I expect you don't even know what I'm talking about?"

Honestly I didn't feel so scared as I had done when Delia brought me up his card.

"Mr. Kirkland has told me all these things."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"Superb! Superb!" he cried. "He has confessed at your knees, has he? You know his habits, too? His—"

He was getting too angry to speak. I waited there by the table while he talked. There was a book lying there that Mr. Kirkland had just brought me; it was called *A Human Document*. We were reading it together. I put my hand over the title—it sort of hurt me to see it.

"You mean to tell me you know the dissolute life my nephew has led, and that you will marry him in spite of it?"

"Yes, sir."

"But of course you will!" he laughed. "*You* have nothing to lose! You expect he will inherit from me, and be a rich man! I count on you to break off at once if you have an ounce of real affection for Stephen."

I said that I thought he had better speak to his nephew.

"I prefer, on the contrary, to leave it with you, and have you handle the affair in your own quiet and dignified way," he said, earnestly.

But I told him it would be much better for him to speak to Mr. Kirkland.

He turned on me furiously. "You mean you're intent on ruining his life, do you? You are set, then, upon dragging him down—spoiling his career!"

"But you told me just now he *was* pretty low down, Senator Bellars."

And he looked at me sharply. "He *has* been low, indeed, but he is pulling himself together—taking hold. He's a new man, and decidedly on the rise."

"Since when?"

"Nearly two years."

"Do you know why, sir?"

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"I think the tide has turned, and I intend it shall beach Stephen high up, if I can help it."

"What reason had he for turning over this new leaf, do you think?" . . .

He simply glared at me. He had so much common sense that he knew what I was driving at. But he was an awfully proud man.

". . . Those other women you mentioned, sir, hadn't kept him out of the gutter so far."

"Don't stand there, Miss Carey, and tell me that *you* have reformed Stephen."

"No, sir, I don't think so, but he does."

He said, sharply: "Ridiculous! Stephen must marry a woman of his class—a woman with money."

Senator Bellars nodded at me half a dozen times. He looked at me in a queer way, and said, rudely: "What the devil he sees in you I can't tell." Then he put his hand out to me. "Come, tell me you will look at this matter reasonably, Miss Carey."

And I said then that I thought Mr. Kirkland seemed to need me, at which he laughed out loud and glared at me, his bushy hair all rumped. It seemed as though he couldn't give up hope yet.

"You don't know what you are bargaining for. Wait until you see him drunk; wait until he comes home after a three days' spree. Wait! Wait!"

He warned me that I was planning destruction for two lives right there in that room. Then he bade me good-bye, and caught up his hat and coat that were in a heap on the chair.

"I won't see Stephen again from this day, mark you—not if he comes begging on his knees. I shall remake my will

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

before twenty-four hours are over, and I hold you now," he said, breathing hard, "*responsible for Stephen Kirkland; you have undertaken his life.*"

When he had gone down the path and out of the gate like a runaway engine, Fanny came in from the dining-room, where she had been listening. She had heard every word; her cheeks were red as fire.

"Esther Carey!" she cried, "do you mean to say that you are *engaged to Mr. Kirkland?*"

I was trembling so that I fell into a rocker.

"Yes, I am," I told her, "and I guess you know it *now* all right, don't you?"

"Oh, gracious!" she cried. "You don't mean to marry that stupid old bore, do you? After all his uncle said? You must be crazy! Why, he'll disgrace us the first thing you know. You'll have him to support, and drunk at that." She began to cry. "I never thought you would do such a thing, Esther. You flirted with a married man until I was scared to death, and now you are going to marry a *drunkard*. I thought you had more sense."

I told her to be quiet and go up-stairs; that as long as we stayed under the same roof I wouldn't hear a word from her about my life or about Mr. Kirkland. She shut up, but we were both mad, and she went out to eat supper with some friends and I had mine alone.

CHAPTER XVI



R. KIRKLAND came in about nine o'clock. I knew his long, slow step well. I wondered if his uncle had made a scene with him, and he had come to realize what a poor match I really was. He took off his soft felt hat and his long coat, with the floating sleeves, and threw them on the rack in the hall. Several little parcels in his hands he held out to me, smiling.

"Where's Fanny?"

She was out to supper in Brackettsville, I told him.

"Here are some caramels for her, some marshmallows for me—and here are some cigarettes and some matches!"

I saw that the danger-signals were up with him. He had a couple of bottles of ginger-ale.

"Let's have these opened, will you, Esther?" And he gave me a book. "You can cut the pages while I smoke."

We went into the parlor. For a long time we talked about general things. Then he said:

"My dear girl, now let's see what Fate can do to us. We have the world before us."

I understood right then and there that his uncle had turned him out, and I was on the point of asking him "Which way *will* you turn?" but I waited. He had crowds of rich and influential friends—his uncle's and his own. He drank the two bottles of ginger-ale and ate the whole box of marsh-

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

mallows, smiling at the ceiling and at me through his smoke.

"Have you copied out the first act of my drama, Esther? Get it; I'll read it to you."

He read beautifully, gesturing and smoking hard between the scenes. Where it says,

"Lady of those wide brows—Lady of those white hands,
Men have gone down to hell for thee and up as high
For one long sight of thee; and men have dived
Down to the ocean's bed for one sole pearl" . . .

he said: "Esther, that is your portrait, you know. I shall finish this drama at the Huntley. I'm going to work fourteen hours a day." Then he threw up his arms and exclaimed: "Free! Free! Why, it seems too good to be true! I am much obliged to you, my dear, for opening my prison doors."

I saw by this that he meant to take up a new career and not try working in town.

"How do you like the verses?" he asked, like a child all eagerness. And I told him that I thought they were "perfectly fine." He seemed pleased.

"I rather think your beautiful sister doesn't like me, Esther."

I told him that Fanny was silly and only used to the Brackettsville people, and she couldn't appreciate an unusual man such as he was.

"Nonsense, my dear girl," he laughed. "I'm just like the rest, only a little *more* ridiculous! And the wonder in my mind is what in Heaven's name *you* see in me!"

And I smiled as I remembered it was just what his uncle had said on the other side.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

Then he came over to where I was sitting, and took my sewing from my hands and drew up a chair by my side.

"Months ago I told you I had brought some work out for you to do, my dear. Well, I didn't leave it that day, but it's here now," and as he said this he seemed to put the work in my hands with his hands. "Do you want to undertake it? Do you want to undertake it?"

I wanted to burst out crying right there and then, but I just drew Stephen's head down on my shoulder as though he were a child, and I said:

"You know I am used to work, and I am not afraid of yours."

Fanny got engaged about this time to a young fellow in town. My sister didn't tell me she was engaged for a long time, but Charlie kept coming and coming. They sat in the dining-room, and Mr. Kirkland and I in the parlor. Mr. Kirkland was working awfully hard. He shut himself up in his little room at Mrs. Huntley's, and the boarders could hear him walking up and down at night and reading out loud, and the entire house smelled of his black cigarettes. Mrs. Huntley said she didn't mind. She thought he was a "genius," and so polite, "if he did just throw his things down anywhere!"

"I guess you'll have pretty work clearing up after him when you're married, Miss Carey! I don't see how you're ever going to train him."

One night, after the holidays, Charlie De Groot went early, and I was in bed when Fanny came to my room. Her cheeks were bright red.

"Esther, you are so cold and stiff and hard that I never know how to take you." She sat down at the foot of my

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

bed. "But I've got to speak out now. Can't you *crawl* out of marrying Stephen Kirkland?"

She was so excited that I didn't want to speak sharply to her. "Don't let's discuss these things, Fanny; let's each of us go our own way."

"Goodness! I wouldn't care if we could do that. But Charlie won't marry me if you go and throw yourself away on Mr. Kirkland."

I sat up in bed. I didn't say a single word. I tried to remember that she was the youngest, and that neither of us had had any mother. Fanny began to cry.

"If Charlie De Groot's marrying you depends upon what other people do and are, Fanny, why, he isn't worth his salt, that's all."

"Why, Charlie's perfectly fine!" she cried. "He's from the best family in Brackettsville, and nobody ever said a word against him, and he's earning fifteen a week now, and his office is a first-class firm. Don't say a word against him, Esther Carey!"

"I won't unless he makes me."

"Mr. Kirkland will go back to drinking as soon as you are married. Charlie says they always do. His uncle's mad at him, and he's lazy, and who is going to support you all?"

I said it wouldn't be Charlie De Groot anyway, and I almost laughed out loud. It seemed funny to me then.

"And the little boys," Fanny went on; "you won't be able to help with them. I can't ask Charlie to support *my family*." Then she begged me: "Esther, won't you get out of it before it is too late?"

And I said I didn't want to get out of it. She got angry.

"That's not all, Esther Carey. I didn't think I'd have to tell you, but I do have to for all our sakes. *He's perfectly*

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

dreadful! He's just as fast as he can be," and she dropped her voice to a whisper. "Charlie says he's keeping a woman now in New York, on Thirty-eighth Street."

I got up out of bed, and went out of the room while she was speaking to me, and shut the door behind me. The only other vacant room was the room where Tommy had died, and I went in and shut the door and locked it, and sat down in a chair by the window, and just as I did so it seemed to me I could hear poor Tommy's voice from the bed saying: "*Mr. Kirk is all right.*"

Fanny had to go in to work early the next day, and she didn't come near my door. I packed my things—one trunk and a suit-case and a bag—and left my room in order and empty, and went out of the house where we had all lived for fourteen years or more. I intended to take a room in New York and work there, and let Fanny run her life as she liked. The things that she said about Mr. Kirkland didn't frighten me. I knew the old story that Charlie De Groot had heard, and that it was all done away with and past ever since Mr. Kirkland had got to know me. He was on my train. I saw that I would have to tell him something or other. He was in fine spirits. He had a big bundle of his manuscript with him. He was going to see a publisher in Bond Street; he was smiling, and as happy as a boy.

"Just wait until you see the announcement of my book and the press notices, Esther."

I didn't say anything until it was time to leave him at the ferry. Then I told him that I wasn't going out to Brackettsville again that night; that I had my trunk and bags checked, and was going to find a boarding-house room—I knew of a good one on Washington Square. He looked as if he would drop with surprise. He knew what had happened without

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

bed. "But I've got to speak out now. Can't you *crawl* out of marrying Stephen Kirkland?"

She was so excited that I didn't want to speak sharply to her. "Don't let's discuss these things, Fanny; let's each of us go our own way."

"Goodness! I wouldn't care if we could do that. But Charlie won't marry me if you go and throw yourself away on Mr. Kirkland."

I sat up in bed. I didn't say a single word. I tried to remember that she was the youngest, and that neither of us had had any mother. Fanny began to cry.

"If Charlie De Groot's marrying you depends upon what other people do and are, Fanny, why, he isn't worth his salt, that's all."

"Why, Charlie's perfectly fine!" she cried. "He's from the best family in Brackettsville, and nobody ever said a word against him, and he's earning fifteen a week now, and his office is a first-class firm. Don't say a word against him, Esther Carey!"

"I won't unless he makes me."

"Mr. Kirkland will go back to drinking as soon as you are married. Charlie says they always do. His uncle's mad at him, and he's lazy, and who is going to support you all?"

I said it wouldn't be Charlie De Groot anyway, and I almost laughed out loud. It seemed funny to me then.

"And the little boys," Fanny went on; "you won't be able to help with them. I can't ask Charlie to support *my family*." Then she begged me: "Esther, won't you get out of it before it is too late?"

And I said I didn't want to get out of it. She got angry.

"That's not all, Esther Carey. I didn't think I'd have to tell you, but I do have to for all our sakes. *He's perfectly*

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

dreadful! He's just as fast as he can be," and she dropped her voice to a whisper. "Charlie says he's keeping a woman now in New York, on Thirty-eighth Street."

I got up out of bed, and went out of the room while she was speaking to me, and shut the door behind me. The only other vacant room was the room where Tommy had died, and I went in and shut the door and locked it, and sat down in a chair by the window, and just as I did so it seemed to me I could hear poor Tommy's voice from the bed saying: "*Mr. Kirk is all right.*"

Fanny had to go in to work early the next day, and she didn't come near my door. I packed my things—one trunk and a suit-case and a bag—and left my room in order and empty, and went out of the house where we had all lived for fourteen years or more. I intended to take a room in New York and work there, and let Fanny run her life as she liked. The things that she said about Mr. Kirkland didn't frighten me. I knew the old story that Charlie De Groot had heard, and that it was all done away with and past ever since Mr. Kirkland had got to know me. He was on my train. I saw that I would have to tell him something or other. He was in fine spirits. He had a big bundle of his manuscript with him. He was going to see a publisher in Bond Street; he was smiling, and as happy as a boy.

"Just wait until you see the announcement of my book and the press notices, Esther."

I didn't say anything until it was time to leave him at the ferry. Then I told him that I wasn't going out to Brackettsville again that night; that I had my trunk and bags checked, and was going to find a boarding-house room—I knew of a good one on Washington Square. He looked as if he would drop with surprise. He knew what had happened without

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

bed. "But I've got to speak out now. Can't you *crawl* out of marrying Stephen Kirkland?"

She was so excited that I didn't want to speak sharply to her. "Don't let's discuss these things, Fanny; let's each of us go our own way."

"Goodness! I wouldn't care if we could do that. But Charlie won't marry me if you go and throw yourself away on Mr. Kirkland."

I sat up in bed. I didn't say a single word. I tried to remember that she was the youngest, and that neither of us had had any mother. Fanny began to cry.

"If Charlie De Groot's marrying you depends upon what other people do and are, Fanny, why, he isn't worth his salt, that's all."

"Why, Charlie's perfectly fine!" she cried. "He's from the best family in Brackettsville, and nobody ever said a word against him, and he's earning fifteen a week now, and his office is a first-class firm. Don't say a word against him, Esther Carey!"

"I won't unless he makes me."

"Mr. Kirkland will go back to drinking as soon as you are married. Charlie says they always do. His uncle's mad at him, and he's lazy, and who is going to support you all?"

I said it wouldn't be Charlie De Groot anyway, and I almost laughed out loud. It seemed funny to me then.

"And the little boys," Fanny went on; "you won't be able to help with them. I can't ask Charlie to support *my family*." Then she begged me: "Esther, won't you get out of it before it is too late?"

And I said I didn't want to get out of it. She got angry.

"That's not all, Esther Carey. I didn't think I'd have to tell you, but I do have to for all our sakes. *He's perfectly*

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

dreadful! He's just as fast as he can be," and she dropped her voice to a whisper. "Charlie says he's keeping a woman now in New York, on Thirty-eighth Street."

I got up out of bed, and went out of the room while she was speaking to me, and shut the door behind me. The only other vacant room was the room where Tommy had died, and I went in and shut the door and locked it, and sat down in a chair by the window, and just as I did so it seemed to me I could hear poor Tommy's voice from the bed saying: "*Mr. Kirk is all right.*"

Fanny had to go in to work early the next day, and she didn't come near my door. I packed my things—one trunk and a suit-case and a bag—and left my room in order and empty, and went out of the house where we had all lived for fourteen years or more. I intended to take a room in New York and work there, and let Fanny run her life as she liked. The things that she said about Mr. Kirkland didn't frighten me. I knew the old story that Charlie De Groot had heard, and that it was all done away with and past ever since Mr. Kirkland had got to know me. He was on my train. I saw that I would have to tell him something or other. He was in fine spirits. He had a big bundle of his manuscript with him. He was going to see a publisher in Bond Street; he was smiling, and as happy as a boy.

"Just wait until you see the announcement of my book and the press notices, Esther."

I didn't say anything until it was time to leave him at the ferry. Then I told him that I wasn't going out to Brackettsville again that night; that I had my trunk and bags checked, and was going to find a boarding-house room—I knew of a good one on Washington Square. He looked as if he would drop with surprise. He knew what had happened without

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

bed. "But I've got to speak out now. Can't you *crawl* out of marrying Stephen Kirkland?"

She was so excited that I didn't want to speak sharply to her. "Don't let's discuss these things, Fanny; let's each of us go our own way."

"Goodness! I wouldn't care if we could do that. But Charlie won't marry me if you go and throw yourself away on Mr. Kirkland."

I sat up in bed. I didn't say a single word. I tried to remember that she was the youngest, and that neither of us had had any mother. Fanny began to cry.

"If Charlie De Groot's marrying you depends upon what other people do and are, Fanny, why, he isn't worth his salt, that's all."

"Why, Charlie's perfectly fine!" she cried. "He's from the best family in Brackettsville, and nobody ever said a word against him, and he's earning fifteen a week now, and his office is a first-class firm. Don't say a word against him, Esther Carey!"

"I won't unless he makes me."

"Mr. Kirkland will go back to drinking as soon as you are married. Charlie says they always do. His uncle's mad at him, and he's lazy, and who is going to support you all?"

I said it wouldn't be Charlie De Groot anyway, and I almost laughed out loud. It seemed funny to me then.

"And the little boys," Fanny went on; "you won't be able to help with them. I can't ask Charlie to support *my family*." Then she begged me: "Esther, won't you get out of it before it is too late?"

And I said I didn't want to get out of it. She got angry.

"That's not all, Esther Carey. I didn't think I'd have to tell you, but I do have to for all our sakes. *He's perfectly*

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

dreadful! He's just as fast as he can be," and she dropped her voice to a whisper. "Charlie says he's keeping a woman now in New York, on Thirty-eighth Street."

I got up out of bed, and went out of the room while she was speaking to me, and shut the door behind me. The only other vacant room was the room where Tommy had died, and I went in and shut the door and locked it, and sat down in a chair by the window, and just as I did so it seemed to me I could hear poor Tommy's voice from the bed saying: "*Mr. Kirk is all right.*"

Fanny had to go in to work early the next day, and she didn't come near my door. I packed my things—one trunk and a suit-case and a bag—and left my room in order and empty, and went out of the house where we had all lived for fourteen years or more. I intended to take a room in New York and work there, and let Fanny run her life as she liked. The things that she said about Mr. Kirkland didn't frighten me. I knew the old story that Charlie De Groot had heard, and that it was all done away with and past ever since Mr. Kirkland had got to know me. He was on my train. I saw that I would have to tell him something or other. He was in fine spirits. He had a big bundle of his manuscript with him. He was going to see a publisher in Bond Street; he was smiling, and as happy as a boy.

"Just wait until you see the announcement of my book and the press notices, Esther."

I didn't say anything until it was time to leave him at the ferry. Then I told him that I wasn't going out to Brackettsville again that night; that I had my trunk and bags checked, and was going to find a boarding-house room—I knew of a good one on Washington Square. He looked as if he would drop with surprise. He knew what had happened without

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

bed. "But I've got to speak out now. Can't you *crawl* out of marrying Stephen Kirkland?"

She was so excited that I didn't want to speak sharply to her. "Don't let's discuss these things, Fanny; let's each of us go our own way."

"Goodness! I wouldn't care if we could do that. But Charlie won't marry me if you go and throw yourself away on Mr. Kirkland."

I sat up in bed. I didn't say a single word. I tried to remember that she was the youngest, and that neither of us had had any mother. Fanny began to cry.

"If Charlie De Groot's marrying you depends upon what other people do and are, Fanny, why, he isn't worth his salt, that's all."

"Why, Charlie's perfectly fine!" she cried. "He's from the best family in Brackettsville, and nobody ever said a word against him, and he's earning fifteen a week now, and his office is a first-class firm. Don't say a word against him, Esther Carey!"

"I won't unless he makes me."

"Mr. Kirkland will go back to drinking as soon as you are married. Charlie says they always do. His uncle's mad at him, and he's lazy, and who is going to support you all?"

I said it wouldn't be Charlie De Groot anyway, and I almost laughed out loud. It seemed funny to me then.

"And the little boys," Fanny went on; "you won't be able to help with them. I can't ask Charlie to support *my family*." Then she begged me: "Esther, won't you get out of it before it is too late?"

And I said I didn't want to get out of it. She got angry.

"That's not all, Esther Carey. I didn't think I'd have to tell you, but I do have to for all our sakes. *He's perfectly*

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

dreadful! He's just as fast as he can be," and she dropped her voice to a whisper. "Charlie says he's keeping a woman now in New York, on Thirty-eighth Street."

I got up out of bed, and went out of the room while she was speaking to me, and shut the door behind me. The only other vacant room was the room where Tommy had died, and I went in and shut the door and locked it, and sat down in a chair by the window, and just as I did so it seemed to me I could hear poor Tommy's voice from the bed saying: "*Mr. Kirk is all right.*"

Fanny had to go in to work early the next day, and she didn't come near my door. I packed my things—one trunk and a suit-case and a bag—and left my room in order and empty, and went out of the house where we had all lived for fourteen years or more. I intended to take a room in New York and work there, and let Fanny run her life as she liked. The things that she said about Mr. Kirkland didn't frighten me. I knew the old story that Charlie De Groot had heard, and that it was all done away with and past ever since Mr. Kirkland had got to know me. He was on my train. I saw that I would have to tell him something or other. He was in fine spirits. He had a big bundle of his manuscript with him. He was going to see a publisher in Bond Street; he was smiling, and as happy as a boy.

"Just wait until you see the announcement of my book and the press notices, Esther."

I didn't say anything until it was time to leave him at the ferry. Then I told him that I wasn't going out to Brackettsville again that night; that I had my trunk and bags checked, and was going to find a boarding-house room—I knew of a good one on Washington Square. He looked as if he would drop with surprise. He knew what had happened without

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

a word from me. He looked awfully serious for a minute, and then laughed.

"It's that miserable little puppy—that pitiful little De Groot. Never mind, my dear girl, it's of no importance, but I'm heartily sorry for your sister. However, *that* is none of my affair!"

He took me by the arm and we walked slowly over to Broadway, and he told me it was no use going on like this, that we had better get married right then and there.

I thought he was right.

I went over to my office and told the girls that I wouldn't be in that day, and Mr. Kirkland went to get the license and to fix things as well as he could. I met him in the vestry of old Trinity Church at three o'clock. We were married there. He had one of his friends with him—Mr. Oliver Sinclair; he was tall and pale, with dark eyes and a dark mustache. He seemed very fond of Mr. Kirkland, and he was lovely to me. It was the 29th of December, and cold and fine, with lots of sun. I thought the church was lovely, so still and so remote, and the three-o'clock bells rang just as we were married. We went up-town in a car to Washington Square to choose our rooms, and after that Mr. Kirkland wouldn't hear of anything but our going right over the ferry to see Fanny.

"It wouldn't do to desert her." He put it that way. He said she was "a beautiful little goose," and he wasn't angry a bit; he just laughed. Fanny generally went home on the half-past five ferry, and we were on it ourselves waiting in the rear. She looked scared when she saw Mr. Kirkland. He was awfully nice to her; he called her "little sister," and said they were going to be the best of friends. I told her to

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

look after the house and to get Lil De Groot to come and stay a couple of weeks with her, and we would see what we would do in a little while. We parted friends. Mr. Kirkland was as gay as could be, and treated her so elegantly that she melted a little, and at the train she kissed me.

CHAPTER XVII



HE wanted me to give up my business. I never went to work again after I was married, and I missed my work perfectly dreadfully, because I wasn't accustomed to anything but regular, constant, methodical employment, and it was part of me.

Mr. Kirkland had some money in the bank, and we lived on that. We didn't try to save, because he was sure his book was going to be a great success. I shared with Fanny the expenses of the little boys until they should be able to take care of themselves. During the past years I had saved up quite a little, I had lived so plainly.

We went out to Trenton to see the boys, who were in school there. My husband took them all sorts of presents, and they thought he was perfectly fine. When we left the school Petey kissed me, and said:

"Say, Sis, he's great! He can knock the spots out of Fanny's 'feller'!" I took this as a real compliment, and so did my husband when I told him, although he laughed and said it was easy enough to see who was Petey's favorite sister!

We had two big rooms in Washington Square. Mr. Kirkland wrote in one, and I sat in the other and read and looked out of the window. I did all his typewriting for him, for I

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

had my own machine there, and I copied out what he wanted, and it kept me busy.

He talked to me about so many things that were new to me and that I didn't understand that I tried to read and cultivate myself. He had trunks full of books when he fetched his things home from the storehouse, and when I unpacked them there was nothing but books and old clothes and tobacco, old pipes and paints and pencils. We had books everywhere, and the rooms looked like a circulating library. Mr. Sinclair came in a great deal in the evenings, and they two used to smoke and read and laugh and talk, and I sat and sewed and listened.

CHAPTER XVIII



FOR two months after I was married I hardly saw a soul but Mr. Sinclair. Fanny came in now and then, but she never stayed long; she hadn't much free time. There was a French lady boarding at our house, and she offered to give me lessons, and I thought it would please my husband if I learned and surprised him, so I took for a month, but I was too shy to be affected enough to learn the accent.

All this time Mr. Kirkland was waiting to hear from Holmes, the publishers, about his drama. He sent it in fine shape, done up in yellow covers:

LUCIA DI SIENA

DRAMA BY STEPHEN KIRKLAND

To My Wife

December 29

Our wedding-day date!

It was a snowy afternoon, and we were sitting up in our rooms talking, when a messenger boy brought in a package with Holmes's mark on it. I knew right away what it was, but my husband didn't. I wanted to go out of the room—it seemed as though I couldn't bear to see him disappointed, as he was going to be. He turned over the packet before he opened it.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"They want me to make some changes in it, I expect," he said. "I know old Harry Holmes and how formal he is. I expect I've shocked him here and there."

I stood beside him when he opened it. There was a very nice letter inside. He read it all through first, very slowly, and then gave it to me. Of course, authors get lots of blows like these, but I don't think any ever came as this did to Mr. Kirkland. He just stared up at me.

"They don't *want* it. Have you read the note, Esther?"

I could have died with pity for him, I understood him so.

"Well, it doesn't make any difference," I said. "There are plenty of other publishers in New York."

The manuscript all fell down on the floor when he got up.

"Yes, and there are lots of roads to hell!" he answered, and went out of the room.

I didn't follow. Two months weren't enough to learn exactly how to do things. It seemed as though it would be best for him to be alone. There had been so many "ups and downs" for sixteen years in my life that it wasn't easy for me to grasp that *one* shock could affect a man so desperately—but he was that kind. He put all of himself in each thing he did. He was proud, and so sure of himself, and, after all, so far nothing had turned out well for him.

I went into our room about two hours later, and his hat and cane were gone. I was crazy. I didn't know where to go after him. It was snowing and blowing, and he had on his thin house boots. Dinner-time came, and when he didn't appear I had no heart to go down with the others, so I sat waiting, watching the snow driving along the streets and the people hurrying past. I tidied up his library, and tried to read and tried to sew, but I was wild. I got them to let me use the telephone down-stairs and called up Mr. Sinclair, but

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

he wasn't in; and then I picked up the manuscript from the floor where my husband had let it fall. I couldn't bear to see it. "Bad luck" wrote itself all over the title-page. I hated it.

I got to know those two rooms pretty well during the winter, but this was the night I learned them best. Mr. Kirkland's cigarette smoke lingered on the air. His cigarette box and the piles of paper which he never let me touch or fix up were on the table, and books everywhere. I couldn't call anybody in the house or speak to them, for I didn't want them to know how scared I was; but at one o'clock I'd just made up my mind to say something to the boarding-house keeper when I heard him come, and I let him in. He got over to the chair by his table, and sat down.

"Get me a cigarette."

I gave him one, and he ordered, "Light it," and I obeyed him. He was as different from his usual self as night from day. "Sit down, Esther, and listen to the man born out of his time—to the prophet without honor."

I sat down on the sofa, and he began to talk. He asked for some water, and drank a pitcherful. He talked for an hour, and he fell asleep beside the table. I took off his boots and stockings—they were wet through; I got him nearly undressed sitting there in the chair, made him as comfortable as I could and wrapped him up in a quilt, then I went into the other room. I dreaded to see him when he woke up, and I was afraid he would dread to see me. About nine o'clock he came into the bedroom. He looked perfectly awful, and spoke to me as if I were a stranger.

"Can you, without too much trouble, get me a cup of coffee—strong, black coffee?"

I had been up and dressed for a long time, and he got into

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

bed. He stayed in bed all day drinking black coffee and smoking, reading the papers and a new book. At five o'clock he came into the library. He had taken a bath, and had the barber in to shave him and cut his hair.

"Esther," he said, "I want to read you a chapter in this book on finance. Gives you a very good idea of the art of money-making and handling. It is immensely interesting."

I was lying down on the sofa when he came in, and I got up and took my sewing.

"Don't work. Sit with your hands folded and listen. I want to feel that I have your undivided attention."

I think I must have slept a little while he read. He didn't notice it, though. When he had finished his chapter it had cleared up finely outside, and he went out to take a walk. He didn't want me to go with him. He said he was going to meet Sinclair and bring him back to dinner.

I didn't say a word to my husband and he didn't refer to last night, and he didn't ask to see the manuscript ever again. I put it down in my trunk, the one I had packed so hastily when I came from Brackettsville on my wedding-day.

That night, as we were sitting in the library, Mr. Sinclair asked: "What do you hear from your drama, Kirk?"

And my husband answered: "It had a short and happy history, my dear chap—early taken home!"

Mr. Sinclair laughed and said: "You mean, then, it has been accepted?"

"I mean that God loved it too well. It died young."

He understood, and changed the conversation. They began to talk about the finance book.

CHAPTER XIX



NOBODY had acknowledged our marriage in Mr. Kirkland's family. His uncle was in Washington, and against us from the first. But now, when Mr. Kirkland's money was getting low, his aunt in San Francisco died and left him fifty thousand dollars.

He was perfectly delighted.

He put away all his author's paper and his soft black pencils, and I cleaned up the table and brushed out the burned marks as well as I could from the green cloth. He went into the office of an important banker, a friend of Mr. Sinclair's and my husband's, and he invested all his inheritance in a railroad scheme they were putting through.

From then on Mr. Kirkland thought of nothing but money. I don't know how it was or what kind of change of mind came over him, but the same imagination he had put into his drama he put into the office work which he did with Ellis & Ellis. Anyway, he was wonderful. It wasn't my vanity or my pride in him that makes me say this. Mr. Ellis, who afterward made a big fortune with Mr. — and Mr. — came up one night to see Mr. Kirkland at Washington Square.

"Do you know what a brainy man you have married, Mrs. Kirkland?" Mr. Ellis asked me.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

And I told him that I thought my husband could do pretty much anything he set his mind upon.

By the work they gave him and the responsibilities and the way they kept him down at night, working till morning, and by the telegrams and the messages on Sunday, and by my husband's own letters which I wrote out for him, I knew he was valuable.

Mr. Sinclair saw a great deal of my husband, and all Mr. Kirkland's spare time, which wasn't much, he spent with his friend talking about the "Science of Finance" and the "Beauty of Accurate Computation." When my husband's business was over and he had a free minute he would sit down at his desk and make figures. I have put away page after page of these figures—big sheets of foolscap covered with his close, small, black figures. I couldn't imagine what they were about, and I never asked. He wrote them on table-tops, on pages of books, and he would sit and smile over them as if they were something beautiful. He put the same absorption into them that he did into everything else. And if they could have been translated I guess they would have read like a poem. But the poetry books were all dusty, and he never read aloud to me any more. I missed it, and once I asked him what the new novel of the day was.

"My dear Esther, don't fancy that you can find any real music in fiction! There is more æsthetic charm in a problem of Euclid than in all of Shakespeare."

I wrote that down.

Mr. Sinclair was always very nice to me. I never really saw a kinder man. You couldn't tell him a hard-luck story but he would turn out everything he had in his pockets. Once in a winter's storm he gave the overcoat off his back right there in Washington Square to a tramp.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

He caught a fearful cold and was laid up in Brooklyn. My husband went over to see him there.

Just the same, from the first I did not like his influence over my husband. I couldn't put my finger on a single reason for this. He was gentle and patient and fond of Mr. Kirkland, but there was something I didn't like. Once I thought I might be jealous because I saw so little of my husband, but that wasn't the real reason, for he was never content unless I was in the corner sewing while he and Sinclair talked.

By one thing I knew that Sinclair was sincere in his friendship for me.

Fanny broke off her engagement. Mr. De Groot turned out to be a regular flirt, and my husband said that there wasn't a real drop of blood in the fellow's body, and Fanny was well out of it; but he wouldn't let her stay in Brackettsville alone, feeling so upset, so we invited her to spend a month with us. She was prettier than ever, and my husband enjoyed having her there, and laughed and joked with her a great deal. Our sitting-room was small, and, when Sinclair and Fanny and all of us sat there with the tobacco smoke, it seemed so full that I took to sitting in the bedroom, and sometimes I was in bed and asleep when Mr. Sinclair went home and Fanny went to her room.

Mr. Kirkland called her "Sunshine" and "Loveliness" and "Clytie," and lots of names, but now she only laughed, when they used to make her mad. One day when Fanny had gone to work my husband said:

"I want you both to come down and see my offices. Esther, stop for your sister after lunch, then come over to Nassau Street and see how I toil over the harmonious accounts."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

I was very much pleased. It was the first time he had suggested my going down-town. I thought perhaps we would meet Mr. Ellis, and I put on my best dress and new gloves. I met Fanny at two o'clock, and went in and asked for my husband. He had an office all to himself, and he was there with his own stenographer. He shook hands with Fanny and said to her:

"So you fetched the primroses to Nassau Street, did you, Sweetness? I thought the spring had come."

She did look springlike, for she had a new hat with primroses, and a new coat, and she was so, so pretty.

He didn't speak to me once. He showed us all over the building, and laughed and talked with Fanny, and Mr. Ellis had us come into his room, too, and when it was time to go my husband got his hat and coat and started up-town with us—that is, with Fanny. He didn't appear to notice that I had come. I waited behind and let them walk on together, and at the corner of Broadway Mr. Sinclair came out of the drug store and saw us and walked along a little ways with me. Then we took the car home. Before he left me at the door Sinclair said to me:

"I wonder if you are as perfect as you seem, Mrs. Kirkland."

I answered that I was just what I seemed, anyway, but it wasn't perfect; and I felt sure he began to talk this way because he had something he wanted to tell me. I stood still in the street and looked at him.

"I am taking it for granted, then, that you *are* perfect, and, in this case, I can speak freely. Don't keep that pretty sister of yours here with you. None of us should play with dangerous emotions, and all of the feelings that a girl of Miss Carey's age has *are* dangerous—"

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

He looked very serious.

—"It isn't fair to—it isn't fair to her. You are not angry with me, are you?"

And I told him not at all.

When my husband and Fanny came in he never asked me where I had disappeared to, or appeared to have remarked my absence. He was very gay. That night he took Fanny to the theatre. It was hard to know just what to do and how to do it. Of course, I wouldn't for the world have spoken to Mr. Sinclair about it. We never referred to it again. I thought of three or four ways.

The next day I went to Trenton to see the little boys, and took a room in a boarding-house, just leaving a line on my husband's table to say that I had gone for over Sunday to the boys. He wired me to come back at once; that he was too busy to come out that Sunday himself—that he should have to work all day.

I didn't answer the telegram. It was Friday when I left Washington Square, and on the following Monday I got a telegram saying that he would be out to Trenton unless I had started home. I sent a wire back saying: "Having a nice time with the boys. All right; don't come."

Tuesday morning I got a letter from Brackettsville from Fanny. She was mad and scared. She said of course she couldn't stay in New York alone with Mr. Kirkland, and that she had gone out home, and that she thought I must be crazy to go off like that without telling a soul.

I saw the little boys every day, and we had soda-water and peanuts and went to a show. They were awfully pleased and were glad to see me. It made me think of Lake Mohawk and Tommy, although neither of them was a bit like Tommy.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

Wednesday as I was walking down Main Street I met my husband coming along toward me. He had a spring overcoat on his arm. He looked tired and hot. When he saw me his face cleared up a little.

"What in Heaven's name are you doing in this hole, Esther, and what does it mean?"

I laughed. "It doesn't mean anything. I just wanted to see the boys."

He looked at me very hard, but he believed me, and then he laughed, too, and said:

"You mustn't ever go away again from this boy! He needs you more than the others do. Why, if it hadn't been for Mr. Ellis's interest in the Rock Island and that it meant a mint of dollars one way or another, I would have come out here the day you left. I would have done it anyway if I hadn't been in a position of trust. I have been miserable without you, Esther."

My husband gave the boys each five dollars, and he was devoted to me all the way home. Mr. Sinclair called when we had finished dinner, and when we said how d' you do to each other he sort of laughed as though he understood what I had been doing. Later, my husband told me that Fanny had gone home on Sunday.

"Do you know your running off like that put us in a ridiculous position? It wasn't like you in the very least. Whatever put it into your head?"

I didn't answer this, but when we went to our room that evening he took the subject up again.

"Since your sister *has* gone back to Brackettsville, *let her stay there*. My dear girl, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but, frankly, Fanny bores me. She is as empty mentally as a beautiful shell."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

He was standing in front of our mantel in his velvet jacket, smoking his long, black cigarettes and smiling.

"Physical beauty is often compelled to pay a price."

I knew that he meant every word he said. He was the most truthful person I ever met. He didn't know what a lie was or what acting was. He felt all he said every time, and he always acted exactly as he felt, no matter what it might be to other persons. He may have been to blame in many things, but he never was anything but real at the time. I told him that I thought Fanny was very pretty and I was sorry that she was to be alone out there.

"Then let her board," he said, indifferently. "Lots of girls board. The first thing you know she will be engaged again. A girl like your sister will have half a dozen affairs, and, ten to one, she will die an old maid."

Then he went on talking to me through the smoke of his cigarette about woman's failings and woman's charms and about the kind of a woman a man likes, and his experiences seemed to have been very wide. I couldn't but think so.

He looked well and handsome these days, and I took great pains to keep his linen nice and clean, looking over his clothes every day before he put them on, as otherwise he would just have worn anything that came to hand. I couldn't but wonder, as he talked, why he had chosen me. And just as I was thinking this he said:

"Let us say a traveller passes by two gardens: one on the Ægean Sea, with its palaces and its fountains and its Oriental seduction. It has its effect, of course, and, ten to one, he squanders there more than he should. Then he comes home to an English garden, with its generous trees, its rose hedge, its comfort, and its cheer, and finds a seat under a

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

spreading tree. He would like to sit there in his old age and sun his old heart!" He came to me and laid his hand on my hair. "I have lifted the latch *into the right garden*, Esther, and I am glad I had the common sense to find the gate."

CHAPTER XX



THE windows of our bedroom in Washington Square fronted the park, and it was always interesting for me to watch the passing. I read Charles Dickens that winter, for I never had had time to go through all his books before. I read, too, some finance books my husband brought in, but I couldn't see what he meant by "beautiful accuracy!" I suppose I have had too much accuracy in my life to see much in it but worry and weariness.

For months I never saw my husband sober enough to talk reasonably. I was waiting all the time for something to tell me *what to do*, and now that I was alone so much I read everything I could and tried to learn what other women did in my position.

Well, they nearly all of them left their husbands for other men, or else they worried their husbands to death and had scenes and cried. Honestly, I never knew women *could* cry so much until I read about them in books! I didn't read of any reforms, though, and not one of the heroes had the genius Mr. Kirkland had. Most of the women were beautiful, real heroines, and I seemed to be the only woman tied to an inebriate and sticking on! I looked over all the pictures that he had in his collection—actresses and dancers, women in tights and artists' models. I was ashamed to look at them long, and just hurried through. They were all beautiful.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

When I had looked at the pictures I said to my husband one day when he was nearly himself:

"Don't you admire that reddish kind of hair they call 'Titian' very much?"

I had heard him rave over the "red, honeyed locks of Venetian girls," and he answered:

"I never look at a woman's hair, my dear Esther. She might be a Hottentot for all I know." Then he went on to say that regular features were a bore, and that there could be more beauty in a cross-eyed woman than in an Aphrodite if she had the "essential."

And after a little I asked him if he would tell me what the "essential" was. He laughed.

"On the contrary, you tell *me*, my dear Esther. I have wondered for two years." And he went on, "If you continue this beauty examination I shall tell you that the only complexion I ever saw that didn't make me think of powder or a rouge-pot or a cold-cream jug was a certain nondescript soft tint that freckles easily in the sun!"

He surprised me very much indeed.

One special night I decided *never, never to say anything*. I guess few women realize what such a decision costs. It is so easy for the most stupid of us to talk and find something to say at the end. I had thought of several ways to begin, and each time this thing happened: my husband acted as though he looked for me to speak, and sometimes he had a real scared expression the next day; and then again he would take on a cross, sullen way as though he would prevent my speaking; and then he would coax like a child other times; but when the time went on and I didn't say anything he grew natural and reasonable and quiet, and I could easily see that he felt perfectly dreadful. There were days when

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

he was plunged in the deepest kind of melancholy, and it would take me pages and pages of reading to cheer him out of his state.

I argued to myself like this: "Now, he *can't* help it—or else he *can*! If he can help it, he will: he is a bright man, and he will get there somehow; and if he *can't* help it, why, what's the use? It is bad enough for him as it is, without me laying it on." So I waited and waited, and I write this so that women like me, in my position, will have a chance to watch how silence worked in my case.

But I did speak about Mr. Sinclair.

I asked my husband what Mr. Sinclair's business was, and he answered, "Sin is an elegant idler, and, like yourself, Esther, Sin is an atmosphere, a desirable background."

"If he's an atmosphere, I'm afraid it is bad air," I said, and my husband seemed surprised.

"Why, what do you mean?"

"I mean that if I had a boy I shouldn't care to have him go with Mr. Sinclair, pleasant as he is."

My husband was going out to the Century Club, of which he was a member, but he waited when I began to speak, and sat down.

"My dear girl, you are out of your mind. Sin is the quintessence of friendship and devotion, and he hasn't a single vice. Heavens! You don't know what you owe that man!"

"I don't want to owe him anything. I have always gotten along all right without debts."

My husband said that Mr. Sinclair admired me extravagantly, and that he was always singing my praises. This made me awfully mad, and I didn't go on, and began to

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

wonder if I could be jealous. As I couldn't seem to put my finger on a real reason for my dislike of my husband's friend, I concluded that must be it—I must be horribly jealous. Mr. Sinclair came just as usual, and was gentle and very nice to me.

CHAPTER XXI



It was terribly hot that summer, and we went up to the Adirondacks for a vacation. I thought the open air would be fine for my husband, but the pool and the billiard room kept him indoors all day and all night, and I sat on the piazza and waited for him most of the summer.

Now and then he would sit on the piazza and read the papers by my side, or he would go to sleep in a long chair while I sewed, and sometimes we took walks in the piney woods.

But I grew to hate that resort, and the smell of the bar, the clicking of the balls, the sound of the music in the ball-room, when I used to be sitting up in the hot bedroom with the mosquitoes buzzing and buzzing, waiting for my husband to come up-stairs. Why, it all used to make me perfectly crazy, and I used to ask myself what had happened to change me so.

There was one perfectly beautiful girl from Washington, a Miss Pagee, and she was simply crazy about him. I watched them laugh and carry on, and he sent down to New York and got up some books for her, and by that time I had decided that it was certainly all my fault things went as they did between us two, and that I wasn't the proper wife for him, and, as his uncle had said, I had "spoiled his life." Honestly, I guess I should have done something desperate right up there at Paul Smith's if it hadn't been for what happened then.

CHAPTER XXII



HERE were times when I could hardly bear to look at her, it hurt me so. They all said she was awfully stylish.

Mr. Kirkland said, "As far as standards go, she is faultlessly beautiful, Sin."

And Mr. Sinclair answered in a way that went all through me, "Well, I expect *you* should know, Kirk—you're a connoisseur."

She was Mr. Kirkland's kind—what he was used to, and she had travelled widely in Europe, and they could talk about cities and places together. Her aunt and she had the table next to ours in the dining-room, and he would call across to her from our table about Paris and Vienna, and they told lots of jokes and laughed a great deal. In her ears she wore diamonds that looked like two big drops of clear water. When she laughed she was sparkling. She was awfully pretty—I suppose there wasn't any doubt about it—but she wasn't my kind.

I often didn't know which way to turn and look at table, because I sat between them and they talked across me, and I was in the way; and, sitting there like that, things used to get small and to fade away; the noise of the plates and the waitresses passing and calling out and hitting my arm, and Miss Pagee's laugh—a soft, affected laugh—it all made me nervous and wild.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

I never thought so much about Will Falsworth as I did then, and I kept saying over and over again to myself: "Now, remember that you were in love with a married man! See how it feels!" But it didn't help any.

After dinner my husband would row Miss Pagee out late in the moonlight. From the piazza where I sat in the rocking-chair I could see the boat, with just two dark specks in it, drifting around in the moonlight, and the others would be dancing in the ball-room, but even then I could hear her laugh far out on the lake when the music wasn't too loud.

One night when I was sitting there alone Mr. Sinclair, who was in the woods for a few days, came up on the porch and joined me.

"Where's Kirk?"

I pointed out to the lake.

"Do you mean he has drowned himself?"

He laughed, and I answered, "Oh no, he has just gone out for a while with Miss Pagee."

Mr. Sinclair kept me company. He was well and bright, and he said it was "fiendishly hot in town," and that we were "lucky dogs to be up here in this Eden."

When my husband and Miss Pagee rowed back and landed we could see them coming up together from the boat-house, and he had her long, white coat over his arm. It dragged like a dead thing—like a drowned woman, and it had an awful look about it to me. She was walking alongside of him, in white, too. They made a summery picture. She went indoors without stopping, and my husband and Mr. Sinclair sat talking a little while by me, and then he said he had a lot of business to talk over with Mr. Kirkland, and asked him to come into the smoking-room.

CHAPTER XXIII



MR. SINCLAIR stayed up there several days. There were some important interests in the market that they both were absorbed in. They were telegraphing all the time, and Mr. Sinclair didn't seem in the least to be bothered about my husband's flirtation with Miss Pagee, although he had been upset in the case of Fanny; but now, on the contrary, he kept alongside of me, and the other two were left together all the time. But as soon as Miss Pagee left my husband Mr. Sinclair would join him immediately and get him talking about their mutual affairs.

My husband was in splendid humor these days. He talked about beginning a new book.

He had the habit of telling me about all his affairs in the office, and I was able to understand, for he had taught me, and I had read with care, but up here he said nothing about this last business deal, and when I came anywhere near the subject it irritated him so that I would let it drop. One night I was taking a little walk up and down the piazza, and passed my husband and his friend, and I heard Mr. Kirkland say:

"Now, we mustn't get all the eggs in one basket, Sin, and I am really not willing—"

And Mr. Sinclair interrupted in his quiet voice. Then I

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

went right up and sat down by them, and they stopped talking.

I could see my husband's face in the full moonlight. The nights were gorgeous, for it was the harvest-moon, and the lake was all white like snow, and the forests around as black as death. My husband's face was quiet and peaceful and serene, and I was glad that he had kept straight for so long. As I looked up at him he smiled and said, in a soft voice, "*Dear girl.*" And Mr. Sinclair asked, laughing, "Who, pray?" and my husband answered, "Millie Pagee. Isn't that a euphonious name—*Millie?* Dear girl!"

He didn't seem to know I was there.

"What hair!" he went on. "Have you observed it, Sin? It's like a Byzantine prune in July."

There was a storm let loose in me every time Mr. Sinclair and Stephen talked together like this, and I began, by-and-by, to be afraid I would bear its ravages in my face. Once I looked in the glass to see whether I hadn't changed terribly since we came to Paul Smith's, but I couldn't see that there was a difference—as I hadn't been off the piazza much I hadn't even tanned, and there was so much calm in my face I didn't wonder they talked on before me as if I were a statue.

What could I do?

Another time my husband said:

"Sin, do you recall that Spanish marvel of sinuosity—that little beauty who threw a rose in our box at Madrid?"

"Yes," Mr. Sinclair answered, "but she was too thin."

And my husband replied, scornfully, "A woman is only attractive when she is so thin that if you held her up by her neck you could hear her bones rattle."

I tried not to mind that there wasn't anything of the freak

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

in me. I wasn't fat—but there wasn't a bone in view, and once more I felt lowered in my husband's standards of "absolute loveliness."

They had memories together, experiences together, things they should have kept to themselves and have never referred to before me. It shamed me. I suffered in my way, and I shouldn't like to write what my feelings were toward Mr. Sinclair. He seemed to want to put my husband before me in his weakest light, and then to lead him on with Miss Pagee. As for Stephen's nonsense, well, I didn't half believe all he said—he was so poetical!

The next day after his admiration of the bony woman he said to Mr. Sinclair, and I suppose meant it at the time: "There is something of the sultan in us all, Sin; for my part, those ivory-shouldered, round beauties of the harem are the one feminine type I can understand a man admiring."

It may be awfully silly—one way or another it was all perfectly ridiculous—but that night when I undressed for bed I felt a little higher up in the line.

The day Mr. Sinclair went back to New York on the early train, my husband wasn't himself, nor from then on for several days. What the people thought was unimportant, but it made me a little ashamed for him, for he seemed timid when he went down on the porch; but everybody acted as though they thought he had been ill, and Miss Pagee was lovely to him.

That first day they went out for a long walk, and the day after he took her paddling; then they made a plan to go up into one of the little rivers on an excursion. He paddled like an Indian, and it made a pretty sight to see them shooting off in the slender, thin canoe. They left the hotel at four in the afternoon. From being up so much in the night

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

I was tired, and laid down on my bed, and it was hot and stifling, and the flies buzzed and buzzed, for you couldn't keep them out, screens or no screens. I slept heavily. When Miss Pagee's aunt came in and waked me up I opened my eyes and didn't know where I was at first. They hadn't come back yet, and it was after nine o'clock, and she was much alarmed.

For a minute it went over me, and, like a vision, I saw my husband carrying the long, white cloak on his arm—then I knew how silly it was, and I told Miss Pagee's aunt that I was sure it was perfectly all right, that my husband never had any idea of time, and that he was like a fish in the water. But she was anxious, and made me light the lamp. It was embarrassing to have her come in on me like this. I was in my dressing-jacket, and she was a perfect stranger, but she sat down. She didn't seem to mind, she was so upset. She didn't like it "at all—not at *all*," she kept saying, and everybody in the house was talking about it. Then she stopped as though she remembered to whom she spoke.

"About what?" And I guess my tone scared her.

"Oh, you know how people go on."

And I said, "Yes, summer hotels are celebrated for *the rocking-chair club*."

"You are too indifferent, Mrs. Kirkland."

And as lightly as I could I said that my husband was a great admirer of ladies' beauty.

She stared at me as though she thought I was a fool.

"Why, but don't you *care*?"

"I like to see him amused," I answered.

Miss Pagee's aunt gave a sniff, then said:] "Well, I would like to see them come home! It's scandalous. I'll never chaperon Millie Pagee again as long as I live."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

Then she let me get dressed, and I tried not to be anxious, but, as time went on and ten o'clock came, and eleven o'clock came, everybody in the hotel was talking and wondering and watching out on the lake for the boat and calling out through megaphones; but they didn't come.

Miss Pagee's aunt had some guides start out for White River at midnight, and we sent more guides through the woods. There was nothing else for us to do. A telegram had come for my husband, and I kept it in my lap, and Miss Pagee's aunt and I sat side by side on the piazza in the corner next to the woods, and she cried and told me a lot about her niece, how gay Millie was and how headstrong, and that she had always been a flirt.

"But this is the worst case," she said, with perfect indifference to my feelings. "I have never seen Millie so absorbed as she is now. I shall take her away from here to-morrow—that is, if she ever comes back! If she does," she concluded, "her reputation is ruined, ruined!" And she blew her nose.

It may be strange to say, but her words didn't hurt me in the least. For some reason or other I was perfectly calm, and I felt rather solemn. I couldn't shake off the superstition that something had happened to Miss Pagee, and that my husband was all right. It was nothing but nervous superstition, no doubt, but that was the reason I took it so easily, I guess.

It would be hours before the guides could return, and a lot of people waited down in the office and at the bar, and it seemed as though I couldn't stand the click of the billiard-balls and the smell of lemon-peel.

At three o'clock in the morning Miss Pagee's aunt and I were both sitting there close to the piazza rail. She was

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

dozing a little when I heard voices near my side, and I looked over the rail, and there were my husband and Miss Pagee walking in from the woods. Miss Pagee's aunt and I both stood up, and she called out:

"Well, Millie Pagee, are you stark, staring *mad*?"

My husband's voice sounded cheerful and calm, and he laughed and answered:

"Yes, Mrs. Burnett, we *are* nearly mad!"

They came up on the steps to us. It seemed that their canoe had sprung a leak up-stream, and the only thing they could do was to make an old carry and walk in to Paul Smith's, so they told us. They looked very white and very tired, and Miss Pagee sank down on a chair and put her face in her hands, and her aunt scolded and scolded, and pretty soon Miss Pagee burst out crying.

"Can't you be still, Aunt Jessica? Can't you see I am exhausted and on the verge of hysterics?"

My husband had gone to get some sandwiches and some milk for her, and when he came back I handed him the telegram. He read it under the lamp hanging up against the door, and the gnats and the mosquitoes swarmed thick around it. He stuffed it in his pocket and said:

"Esther, let's go up. We will bid these ladies good-night. I have to go up to town by the morning train." And he shook hands with Miss Pagee's aunt and said he was dreadfully sorry, and Miss Pagee just touched his hand, hardly looking at him, and we went up-stairs.



**"IT WILL BE SUPPERB TO FIND OURSELVES ABOVE THESE
PETTY ANNOYANCES"**

CHAPTER XXIV



My husband was very much excited, and when we got up to our room he told me that he was about to be a rich man.

"I am speaking in large figures," and he emphasized, "*very* large figures. You have been so simple in your life and your ideas that I doubt if you can realize what it means to be rich. Can you?"

It might have disappointed him if I had told him that I *couldn't* realize it, so I only smiled. Our rooms were hot and close, and the lamp made it hotter. He took off his coat and vest and collar, and walked up and down the room.

"It will be superb," he said, "to find ourselves above these petty annoyances—to be able to do legitimately some of the things I have dreamed of. Esther, how will you look in Bellaggio?" He caught me by the arm and stared at me. "I shall build a pink villa and dream for days on the bosom of Como."

He talked about many things he would do and the places he would see again.

"Sin is a great friend," he repeated many times, "and you didn't like him. My dear girl, you must learn to know the ring of true metal. Sin is the king of friends."

I was sitting on the bed braiding my hair.

My husband went on to say how Mr. Sinclair put him on this deal and advised him to invest in the opening of Wis-

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

consin oil lands, and that he had put in all his own money, and that Mr. Ellis had advanced him a year's salary, and he was getting big pay then. Coming up to me he said:

"Now, I have to put up just a little more margin for a day, for this is the crisis. How much money have you in the savings-bank?"

I told him I had fifteen hundred dollars, and he asked me to lend it to him, and I gave him a check.

He went off at six o'clock as gay as a boy, and he looked well and handsome, I thought, and not a bit as though he had walked twenty miles through the woods. He wrote a long note to Miss Pagee while he waited for the stage in the office.

CHAPTER XXV



MISS PAGEE, when she didn't paddle on the lake, was with me nearly all the time that Mr. Kirkland was in town. He went in on Friday morning, August —, 1903.

"You see, I haven't had enough of canoes yet, Mrs. Kirkland," she said to me.

Miss Pagee was tall like a willow, and slender, and her clothes looked as if they had been created *on* her and belonged to her and couldn't possibly have been worn by any other person. They just *were* her. They were very expensive, and all came from Paris. She didn't brown and tan like the rest of the girls up in the woods, because she wore soft, thick veils wound around her, and creamy, soft gloves that reached up to her elbows, and her clothes smelled like a bunch of flowers.

After dinner she came over with her aunt and talked all the evening with me. I understood what it meant—she had the idea that it was well to show the hotel guests that we were friends.

Mrs. Burnett, her aunt, as soon as she knew there were no cold shoulders turned on her, joined her friends of the rocking-chair club, and Millie Pagee stayed with me all the time. I was expecting every minute she would speak to me about my husband. I was sure she was dying to, but she didn't dare. She was a great talker, and had a slow, sweet

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

voice, and a way of saying "Really!" and "I mean to say." She came from the South, and, without my asking, told me a lot about herself. She had had a very full social life in America, and abroad, too. She told me about being presented at the English court, and described her clothes and her long, white train, and lots of pleasant things she had done. She was older than I was, but she looked like a girl of twenty.

In a few days she got talked out and grew nervous and restless, just as though she were worrying for a letter which she wanted and which didn't come.

I hadn't had a word from my husband, and I was sure that she hadn't had, either. She sat quietly when we were together, with her chin on her hand, gazing out on the lake, and for a week my husband's name never passed between us. Then one night, of my own accord, I began to talk about him, and Miss Pagee dropped her hand like she was shot. Well, it was a great shock to me, for it showed me how she felt, and her cheeks grew scarlet as fire; but I acted as though I didn't notice it, and just mentioned Mr. Kirkland easily and his taste in books; it turned out to be quite enough, though, for she burst in and questioned me as if I were his mother or his sister, not his wife.

After a little I came to the conclusion that I had made a mistake, and tried to change the topic, and when I did so she asked about Mr. Sinclair.

"How awfully in love with you he is, Mrs. Kirkland. Poor man!"

And I guess my face must have been a caution. She laughed out loud. "Oh, don't look so horrified! Poor Mr. Sinclair! I know it is hopeless."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

I told her she was all off the track; that he never thought of me.

"My dear, I never saw a man so in love with a woman. Don't be angry."

It was too silly to be angry at. I couldn't but recall Minnie Falsworth all the time. I thought: "Esther Carey, here you are, getting paid back. If your husband loves Miss Pagee as Will Falsworth loved you, it will be your just deserts."

But I didn't think he did.

No letters came for either of us, and we sat and rocked and talked, and she grew paler and bigger-eyed every day, and more silent. I sewed and was making myself some cravats, but she didn't do anything—only leaned on her hands and studied the lake or the woods, and sort of looked out in a dreamy and wandering way. Her aunt played poker with her friends, and we were alone for two weeks.

How I should have borne it if Mr. Kirkland had written to her it is not easy to say. One evening she came in with a box of *marrons glacés* and offered me some. They had come by express that day. There was a card on the top of the box when she opened it.

"From a man in Boston," she said, and I knew she wasn't telling me a lie. She couldn't have fooled me. We were both of us neglected together.

Things in Wall Street were feverish. I couldn't follow much, for the papers were late and the Wisconsin oil-fields were not quoted, and honestly I didn't care a great deal. Why, I don't know. The figures my husband had told me about weren't real to me, and when I remembered about the Lake of Como—well, I couldn't see myself there at all!

Miss Pagee, though, looked as though she had walked out

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

of some story-book or a marble palace. She went out a great deal paddling these last days. Her aunt didn't want her to go far, and she floated around in sight, paddling, when the lake was red from the sunset and lay like a fiery sea. In the evening she let her veil loose, and it floated around her like a cloud.

On the second Friday night, when my husband had been gone two weeks, Miss Page danced very hard and went around with the others. She had a snow-white ball-dress on, and I could hear her laughing with her partners as she walked up and down, between the dances, on the piazza. Before I went up to my room she came over to me.

"I think I will sit out this dance with you, Mrs. Kirkland," and she laughed and talked with me about the dancers, making fun of them rather cuttingly. Then she asked me if I had heard from Mr. Kirkland, and for a minute I didn't answer. I knew how I would feel if she said she had heard. I didn't want her to be the kind who would tell his wife she had received a letter. When I said that I had had no word from him, she exclaimed, softly: "I am so sorry. I hoped you could give me some news of him and his exciting fortnight."

After a few minutes she leaned over and took my hands in hers.

"I admire you awfully, Mrs. Kirkland. Please don't think me a stupid flatterer to tell you so. You are the sort of woman I have longed all my life to be—so quiet and so strong."

She got up and said that she must go up-stairs, and we walked along side by side to the door of the stairs that led up to my room. She was taller a good deal than I was—

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

nearly as tall as my husband—and she bent down and whispered:

“Let me kiss you. May I?” And she did, quickly, and as I turned to mount the stairs I thought I heard her say, “Forgive me,” but perhaps it was only good-night; anyway, we parted there like that, and she was laughing and gay, and her soft scarf was all floating around her bare neck and arms.

“Why, you act like you were going away,” I said.

“Didn’t my aunt tell you? I thought she had told you. We are leaving to-morrow for Lake Champlain; we are off on the six-o’clock stage. And will you be sure to say good-bye to Mr. Kirkland for us?”

And my first thought was: “I am glad she won’t be here when he comes on Sunday.” And then my next thought was: “I am sorry for her.”

CHAPTER XXVI



THE next day was Saturday, and I was worrying about my husband. Somehow, until Miss Pagee had said good-bye as she did, I hadn't been able to think of him once in the right way. Her figure had been between us every minute. But when the next day came I went and telegraphed to his office.

At noon a lady told me that Miss Pagee and Mrs. Burnett had not gone—that Mrs. Burnett had caught a bad cold, and they were staying on over Sunday. It shocked me dreadfully. It didn't seem as though I could bear it. I went up to my room, thinking how silly I was and how foolish I had been all the time to imagine that I could keep Mr. Kirkland. I thought of Senator Bellars, and how he would shrug his shoulders and say that he had warned us both. I wanted my work back again. Then I decided it wasn't *work* I wanted!

"Esther Carey," I told myself, sitting there in the window, with the blinds drawn to keep out the heat and the flies, "*this* isn't yet the hardest thing a woman has to do. Aren't you up to it? Aren't you ashamed?" And I was. But it was the hardest thing *I* had done so far, anyway! Through the blinds I saw the ladies rocking and doing fancy work. Miss Pagee, her back to me, sat with them, a little to one side, her white parasol, edged with lace, in her hand.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

I made myself look at her long enough to let some of the jealous feeling that ached all through me die down. It wasn't easy. I just stared at her through the blinds until I had thought out this: "If she *is* the woman for Mr. Kirkland, and I have made a selfish mistake, why, I have got to find some way or another to put it right." When I had said this to myself and meant it I felt better.

She wore a big hat with white roses around it, and seemed to be sitting there waiting for some one. The stage came in from the station, and crowds of passengers got off from New York. She thought Mr. Kirkland would come up by that stage. She talked with the guests, and one of the passengers gave her a paper and pointed to something in it which she looked at. Then I saw her go down the steps toward the boat-house under her white parasol—one of the gentlemen walked along with her.

I got a book out of my trunk and read until I got interested in a story, and then, as it was warm and I hadn't anything else to do, I laid down and went to sleep till I was wakened by some one bursting into my room and rushing up to me. It was Mrs. Burnett in her dressing-gown, her hair done in kid curlers. She rushed over to me, and fell on her knees, clutching me.

"My God!" she cried, "my God! Keep me here—don't let me go out of here!"

As soon as I could I asked her what was the matter.

"Millie's drowned—drowned!" she cried, and murmured, and held on to me like a crazy woman, praying me not to let her see her niece—not to let her go out of my room.

I tried to get her to tell me what had happened, and one or two of the other ladies came into my room in great excitement.

CHAPTER XXVI



THE next day was Saturday, and I was worrying about my husband. Somehow, until Miss Pagee had said good-bye as she did, I hadn't been able to think of him once in the right way. Her figure had been between us every minute. But when the next day came I went and telegraphed to his office.

At noon a lady told me that Miss Pagee and Mrs. Burnett had not gone—that Mrs. Burnett had caught a bad cold, and they were staying on over Sunday. It shocked me dreadfully. It didn't seem as though I could bear it. I went up to my room, thinking how silly I was and how foolish I had been all the time to imagine that I could keep Mr. Kirkland. I thought of Senator Bellars, and how he would shrug his shoulders and say that he had warned us both. I wanted my work back again. Then I decided it wasn't *work* I wanted!

"Esther Carey," I told myself, sitting there in the window, with the blinds drawn to keep out the heat and the flies, "*this* isn't yet the hardest thing a woman has to do. Aren't you up to it? Aren't you ashamed?" And I was. But it was the hardest thing *I* had done so far, anyway! Through the blinds I saw the ladies rocking and doing fancy work. Miss Pagee, her back to me, sat with them, a little to one side, her white parasol, edged with lace, in her hand.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

I made myself look at her long enough to let some of the jealous feeling that ached all through me die down. It wasn't easy. I just stared at her through the blinds until I had thought out this: "If she *is* the woman for Mr. Kirkland, and I have made a selfish mistake, why, I have got to find some way or another to put it right." When I had said this to myself and meant it I felt better.

She wore a big hat with white roses around it, and seemed to be sitting there waiting for some one. The stage came in from the station, and crowds of passengers got off from New York. She thought Mr. Kirkland would come up by that stage. She talked with the guests, and one of the passengers gave her a paper and pointed to something in it which she looked at. Then I saw her go down the steps toward the boat-house under her white parasol—one of the gentlemen walked along with her.

I got a book out of my trunk and read until I got interested in a story, and then, as it was warm and I hadn't anything else to do, I laid down and went to sleep till I was wakened by some one bursting into my room and rushing up to me. It was Mrs. Burnett in her dressing-gown, her hair done in kid curlers. She rushed over to me, and fell on her knees, clutching me.

"My God!" she cried, "my God! Keep me here—don't let me go out of here!"

As soon as I could I asked her what was the matter.

"Millie's drowned—drowned!" she cried, and murmured, and held on to me like a crazy woman, praying me not to let her see her niece—not to let her go out of my room.

I tried to get her to tell me what had happened, and one or two of the other ladies came into my room in great excitement.

CHAPTER XXVI



THE next day was Saturday, and I was worrying about my husband. Somehow, until Miss Pagee had said good-bye as she did, I hadn't been able to think of him once in the right way. Her figure had been between us every minute. But when the next day came I went and telegraphed to his office.

At noon a lady told me that Miss Pagee and Mrs. Burnett had not gone—that Mrs. Burnett had caught a bad cold, and they were staying on over Sunday. It shocked me dreadfully. It didn't seem as though I could bear it. I went up to my room, thinking how silly I was and how foolish I had been all the time to imagine that I could keep Mr. Kirkland. I thought of Senator Bellars, and how he would shrug his shoulders and say that he had warned us both. I wanted my work back again. Then I decided it wasn't *work* I wanted!

"Esther Carey," I told myself, sitting there in the window, with the blinds drawn to keep out the heat and the flies, "*this* isn't yet the hardest thing a woman has to do. Aren't you up to it? Aren't you ashamed?" And I was. But it was the hardest thing *I* had done so far, anyway! Through the blinds I saw the ladies rocking and doing fancy work. Miss Pagee, her back to me, sat with them, a little to one side, her white parasol, edged with lace, in her hand.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

I made myself look at her long enough to let some of the jealous feeling that ached all through me die down. It wasn't easy. I just stared at her through the blinds until I had thought out this: "If she *is* the woman for Mr. Kirkland, and I have made a selfish mistake, why, I have got to find some way or another to put it right." When I had said this to myself and meant it I felt better.

She wore a big hat with white roses around it, and seemed to be sitting there waiting for some one. The stage came in from the station, and crowds of passengers got off from New York. She thought Mr. Kirkland would come up by that stage. She talked with the guests, and one of the passengers gave her a paper and pointed to something in it which she looked at. Then I saw her go down the steps toward the boat-house under her white parasol—one of the gentlemen walked along with her.

I got a book out of my trunk and read until I got interested in a story, and then, as it was warm and I hadn't anything else to do, I laid down and went to sleep till I was wakened by some one bursting into my room and rushing up to me. It was Mrs. Burnett in her dressing-gown, her hair done in kid curlers. She rushed over to me, and fell on her knees, clutching me.

"My God!" she cried, "my God! Keep me here—don't let me go out of here!"

As soon as I could I asked her what was the matter.

"Millie's drowned—drowned!" she cried, and murmured, and held on to me like a crazy woman, praying me not to let her see her niece—not to let her go out of my room.

I tried to get her to tell me what had happened, and one or two of the other ladies came into my room in great excitement.

CHAPTER XXVI



THE next day was Saturday, and I was worrying about my husband. Somehow, until Miss Pagee had said good-bye as she did, I hadn't been able to think of him once in the right way. Her figure had been between us every minute. But when the next day came I went and telegraphed to his office.

At noon a lady told me that Miss Pagee and Mrs. Burnett had not gone—that Mrs. Burnett had caught a bad cold, and they were staying on over Sunday. It shocked me dreadfully. It didn't seem as though I could bear it. I went up to my room, thinking how silly I was and how foolish I had been all the time to imagine that I could keep Mr. Kirkland. I thought of Senator Bellars, and how he would shrug his shoulders and say that he had warned us both. I wanted my work back again. Then I decided it wasn't *work* I wanted!

"Esther Carey," I told myself, sitting there in the window, with the blinds drawn to keep out the heat and the flies, "*this* isn't yet the hardest thing a woman has to do. Aren't you up to it? Aren't you ashamed?" And I was. But it was the hardest thing *I* had done so far, anyway! Through the blinds I saw the ladies rocking and doing fancy work. Miss Pagee, her back to me, sat with them, a little to one side, her white parasol, edged with lace, in her hand.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

I made myself look at her long enough to let some of the jealous feeling that ached all through me die down. It wasn't easy. I just stared at her through the blinds until I had thought out this: "If she *is* the woman for Mr. Kirkland, and I have made a selfish mistake, why, I have got to find some way or another to put it right." When I had said this to myself and meant it I felt better.

She wore a big hat with white roses around it, and seemed to be sitting there waiting for some one. The stage came in from the station, and crowds of passengers got off from New York. She thought Mr. Kirkland would come up by that stage. She talked with the guests, and one of the passengers gave her a paper and pointed to something in it which she looked at. Then I saw her go down the steps toward the boat-house under her white parasol—one of the gentlemen walked along with her.

I got a book out of my trunk and read until I got interested in a story, and then, as it was warm and I hadn't anything else to do, I laid down and went to sleep till I was wakened by some one bursting into my room and rushing up to me. It was Mrs. Burnett in her dressing-gown, her hair done in kid curlers. She rushed over to me, and fell on her knees, clutching me.

"My God!" she cried, "my God! Keep me here—don't let me go out of here!"

As soon as I could I asked her what was the matter.

"Millie's drowned—drowned!" she cried, and murmured, and held on to me like a crazy woman, praying me not to let her see her niece—not to let her go out of my room.

I tried to get her to tell me what had happened, and one or two of the other ladies came into my room in great excitement.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

It seems that Miss Pagee had been paddling out on the lake, and that her paddle slipped, and that the canoe capsized and she fell into the water. A guide saw her and hurried as fast as he could, but it was some distance. Before he could get there she had gone under the third time.

"They're bringing her in now," the ladies said.

I don't know how I got rid of Mrs. Burnett, but I did, and went right down-stairs, and by the time the guide's boat was at the landing I was waiting there. He carried her up in his arms as if she were a child. She hung all limp and slender, and he brought her out like that. There was quite a crowd gathered. We took her into the boat-house, up-stairs, and the doctors did everything they could, but it was no use—she was drowned.

Nobody else seemed to want to, so I took my place by her side and stayed there, and laid her, with the guide's help, on the bed they got ready for her, and I did all that was to be done. Alone there that night with the lamps and the candles, somehow I didn't want any one to help me, and I sort of felt that it was what she would have liked. I dressed her thick, wet hair; I washed her and dressed her in the things her aunt sent; and it was queer, but not until then, when she couldn't make my heart burn and ache any more, did I think she was pretty. She had *never* been my kind, but as she lay there so still, so patiently, in that long, long stillness, I saw what my husband had meant when he said, "She is faultlessly beautiful."

Her wet clothes were drying on a chair, and as I picked up her waist something heavy fell out of it—a letter all soaked through: the one Mr. Kirkland had written her the morning he left for New York, on the Paul Smith's paper. It lay heavy as lead in my hands. I took it over and put it on

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

her breast, where she had worn it all that fortnight. It belonged to *her*—whatever it said—and she could take it with her where she was going. I was glad nobody else had found it, and I couldn't help but wonder what these fourteen days had been for her, and think how she had stayed over at the last in one more hope of seeing him again. I never wanted to know what that letter said. I understood that I didn't have any real right—it might have put my husband so far away from me that he could never get back. It might have made me *despise* him—and if he had been hard to her and cruel, somehow I couldn't have borne it, as she laid there, as well as something else. If he had been more to her than I would ever know, I wanted to let that secret be.

Anyhow, nothing would ever bother her any more.

Everything was quiet down there at the boat-house; there was the sound of the lake just washing up around the boards, and once I heard a boat dragged up on the landing and a guide's voice. Some people were going out fishing early.

Sitting by her side that night it was hard to believe that she was a dead person. She seemed to have fallen asleep, nothing more. Little by little my husband and what she had to do with him just faded out of my feelings entirely as I looked at her lying there.

Then and there I forced myself to think over every hour of that long, dreadful day when the two had been out from four in the afternoon until three in the morning, and I faced it, and after a little I got up and kissed her forehead. It was sweet like a lily. I had taken off her rings and sent them up to her aunt, and her hands lay white and helpless, and I kissed them too.

I stayed there with her until half-past five o'clock, and then the people came and I went up to the hotel.

CHAPTER XXVII



I was Sunday morning, and there wasn't a soul in sight on the way up to the hotel; but by the time I reached the piazza the horn of the station stage blew off in the woods at the Paul Smith's turn. It always brought up the passengers from the fast train, and I waited for it. When it swung around and up to the block I saw a man sitting by the driver, a man that might have been Mr. Kirkland. He was all huddled up in a bunch, his hat jammed down on his head, and my first thought was: "Good gracious, he isn't himself!" And coming like that on what had gone before, the day and the night, it seemed as though I couldn't face it, and I nearly ran down the piazza to escape into the piney woods. But Mr. Kirkland was climbing down off the stage stiffly and with difficulty, and as soon as he turned about and I saw his face it was clear he hadn't been taking anything, but that there was something else wrong. He lifted his hat to me with a bow, as though I were a great lady, and when I came up to him he smiled. He was almost as white as the dead I had left. His beard had grown out and his hair was long, and he looked as though he hadn't slept or eaten for ages.

"You're ill, aren't you?" I said. "Lean on me."

And he answered: "I will, my dear girl, gladly."

He leaned heavily on my shoulder, and we just crawled up

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

to our room. He threw off his overcoat and his hat on the bed, and silently made a sweeping gesture with his hand around the room once or twice; then he said:

"To the four winds, Esther. To the proverbial 'four winds of heaven.' Those celebrated winds are more greedy than any four Jews I ever heard of! Have you got any cigarettes?"

There was a package in the drawer.

He lit one, puffed it, threw it down, and lit a fresh one. I sat down on the edge of the bed, and waited for him to tell me what was the matter. There were no signs of dissipation about him—nothing but great fatigue and terrible excitement. His hands were dreadfully dirty and stained with cigarettes. His nails were bitten down to the quick. Mr. Kirkland was so tall and impressive-looking that he had a way of filling up the place wherever he was, and the little up-stairs room appeared too small for him as he filled up the window. He smiled something like himself, and then said:

"I'm *busted*, Esther!"

And it was the first slang or vulgar word I ever heard him use.

"I haven't a cent in the world—not a cent! Last week I was worth two hundred thousand dollars, though I didn't tell you, and I hung on till the market closed yesterday, when I was wiped out."

I understood that if I didn't speak then—for he was staring at me eagerly—if I didn't say the right thing, he would be terribly angry and go all to pieces. He couldn't imagine, of course, how differently we looked at poverty. I had always been poor, and it was more strange to be well off to me than the old way. It was as though he had said

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

that we'd get on a car and go back to some old place. I said:

"Well, to judge from the faces of the other gentlemen on the stage, you weren't *alone* in the smash-up!" And, queerly enough, I had hit the right thing, for he actually laughed a little.

"Alone? I should think not. Peterson, who came up with me, failed for a million. The market has been insane—mad. You never saw such scenes and such confusion," and he told me all about it. "Standard Oil was offered on the Curb for 125, and couldn't get a bid. My broker went to pot; I might have pulled out otherwise." He waited a minute, then said: "But you don't seem to realize what this means to you and me."

And I only said: "I have always been poor, and I can go to work to-morrow. I don't mind for myself, but I know that it is awful—perfectly awful for a man like you."

He waved his hands about in the same old gesture.

"You shall never work an hour while I live, Esther," he said, solemnly. "Don't make me have to say this again. I'll blow my brains out the day you go to work over my incompetent, miserable failure. I wanted that money just for one thing—just for one thing."

I asked him if he cared to tell me what that was.

"I wanted to show my uncle his mistake."

I didn't tell him that I didn't think it was worth while to go through such a hell as this in order to triumph over Senator Bellars.

"Now," my husband continued, "my uncle can crow over us—and he will."

It was seven o'clock in the morning. He asked me how long it would take me to get my things packed, and I said

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

about a quarter of an hour. He said he would go and get the hotel bill at once and pay it, that he had enough for that and for our tickets to New York.

"We can't stay here an hour, and I never want to see this place by broad day, anyway." He told me that the heat in New York was infernal, and that the mental and nervous strain of the week had been beyond words.

One of my husband's friends had blown his brains out at the ticker in the broker's office when sugar fell forty points. It was easy to see that Mr. Kirkland was trying to be as bright about it as he could.

"It's all in a lifetime, Esther. Everything will be the same in a hundred years from now. It won't make any difference whether you have a diamond tiara or no."

I was folding up my clothes, and the hotel bill came in. My husband paid it, and said he would take the quarter-to-eight stage. He gave the boy five dollars and a cigar.

"I'm pledged to Ellis for a year's salary, and I won't be able even to work that off, because Ellis & Ellis failed on Thursday and brought down a lot with them, although their failure wasn't made public until yesterday."

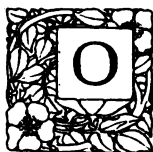
He got in my way at every turn. He walked about and fell over things, and rolled up his clothes and tried to stuff them in, and once or twice the smoke got so thick that I almost fainted. I hoped to Heaven he would not speak of Miss Pagee. I wanted to get away without telling him. He wouldn't take a thing to eat except some coffee, and he drank that strong and black while the men were carrying down our trunk.

The guests at Paul Smith's stayed in bed late on Sundays, and we were the only people for the train. I was awfully glad. I couldn't fix Mr. Kirkland up. He wouldn't hear

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

of it, and even refused to wash his hands. I took him away as he was, talking to me all the time, talking and nervous. I hoped that he wouldn't stop at the office or anywhere, so that they would tell him about the accident. We sat on the back seat, and the stage started off. It was a lovely Sunday morning, quiet and fresh and cool. The lake was bright with flecks of sun, and the smell of the piney forest was spicy and refreshing. Just before we went around the turn in the woods I looked back at the boat-house, and I thought to myself that death and ruin aren't very pleasant things with which to end up a vacation.

CHAPTER XXVIII



ON the way down to New York my husband told me all about his affairs, and it did him good to talk it all out.

"Mr. Sinclair"—I couldn't help but say it —"has proved what a poor adviser he is."

But my husband wouldn't listen to this.

"Poor Sin was nearly insane. He seemed to think of nothing but how you would take it."

"*Me!* Why, I'm the last person he had anything to do with."

"He only cared what you would say or think, or how it would affect your life," my husband said. "He seemed to forget all about me."

"How much did Mr. Sinclair lose?"

"Sin? Why, nothing—he had nothing to lose. The poor chap hasn't had a red cent for years. Men of intelligence, my dear girl, don't need money—they live by their charm."

And the funny thing was that he wasn't even sarcastic.

I didn't dare say anything more or let myself go. I could have killed Mr. Sinclair. Not for the money he had made my husband lose, but for his strange, strange influence. I was convinced that he had made Mr. Kirkland drink to lose his balance, and that he had helped on the flirtation with Miss Pagee, so that his friend would be wax in his hands to do as he wished.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

We went up to a boarding-house in One Hundred and Eleventh Street. We had a small room, and when you went in the close air just stifled you after the woods. When we were going to bed my husband said:

"Ghastly, sordid, vile as is this place, my dear girl, please take in that I have only got the price of this palace for a week ahead!"

Then I said to him, "If I had given you twice as much as I did a couple of weeks ago, could you have held out on your stock?"

He laughed at me. "My poor child, your little savings went like a scrap of paper in a fiery furnace!"

It had taken ten years to save that money, saving hard. It wasn't necessary to remind him of that, though. He had received all the blows he could bear just then. His lips were cracked and dry. He didn't know where he put things—first he threw his dirty boots on the bed, then he laid a lighted cigarette on my dress. I just squeezed it out in time.

"If I could have laid my hand on a hundred thousand dollars and could have obliged Mr. Ellis to listen to me for half a day, I could have saved myself and the firm. That would have been some use, but ten times your little savings wouldn't have helped."

"I'm glad of that, because I had a dreadful feeling that I had been *mean*."

He stopped walking up and down in our little room and asked, "How, pray?"

Then I told him that I had given him only half my savings two weeks ago. I had kept the rest.

He stood stock-still before me, and his jaw dropped. Then he laughed out loud like a child.

"By Jove! By the immortal gods! Are you joking, Esther?"

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"No. I have got just as much again in the savings-bank."

He was perfectly delighted. His whole face altered. If I had told him that the market had turned and that he was a millionaire, I honestly don't think he could have shown more pleasure. He said:

"You ought to have been born in France in the eighteenth century. You would have saved the Treasury." He paid me a lot of compliments. "It will give me a start again," he said, "until I can look around." After he had quieted down a little he said, seriously:

"I don't know, in your acquaintance with me, Esther, if you have had occasion to note one good quality in the stress of all you have been through. But I have got one strong point: for fear you will never discover it, I'll tell you. I keep my word."

I said, "I know you do."

"I shall never speculate on a margin again. I have learned my lesson, my dear girl."

And I said, "I consider it cheap, then, though I don't suppose you will agree with me about that."

I was thinking about this when he said:

"Esther, you have stood by me in a way of which you cannot imagine the importance; now, what can I do for you, my dear?"

He was holding out his hand and looking at me, reasonably and just like his old best self.

"Why, take a hot bath and go to bed, will you?"

He laughed out loud. "Practical!" he said, and I think he was a little disappointed. "Practical, and common sense in the face of tragedies."

"At any rate," I answered, "I am going into the bathroom to let the water run right now."

CHAPTER XXIX



HE went to work as if nothing had happened. He seemed to forget all about his financial experience, and he was so bright and so well educated that it was no time at all before he got another position at a salary of a hundred dollars a month. He had crowds of friends, and they were all fond of him. They seemed to like to stand by him, and even in the little boarding-house the parlor would be full of smoke and talk every evening. The landlady gave the parlor to Mr. Kirkland.

"Nobody but your husband has ever had anything to *say* in my parlor before," she told me, "and if Mr. Kirkland wants to use it like a library, why, he's welcome."

The gentlemen whom my husband brought up to One Hundred and Eleventh Street were a new set. They were friends of his class in Harvard, men whom he seemed just to have remembered. Mr. Holmes, the publisher, was one, and Mr. Sartus, the writer, was another, who made a great name for himself afterward; but the one who came most often of all was a Western man, a very pushing and energetic man—Mr. Collins.

Neither my husband nor myself spoke of Mr. Sinclair, and he didn't come around. Fanny did, though. Her employer's wife had taken a great fancy to her, and invited Fanny to go to Europe with her on a trip. I went down to

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

see Fanny sail, and it was grand to watch the ship push out of the dock, Fanny standing up there so gay and pretty and so perfectly delighted. I couldn't believe my eyes when I realized that a Carey was actually going abroad!

I was the last person on the dock, and I waited until the boat was out of sight, and as I turned to go off the landing who should I see but Mr. Sinclair standing there. He looked more like a ghost than his own self, and he gave me an awful shock. He was white as a piece of paper. His silk hat was all shining, and his spick-and-span black clothes, his black mustache, and his sleek black hair and eyes gave me the feeling that he had been to a funeral; even his eyebrows looked as if they had gone into mourning. He acted as though he didn't dare to speak to me at first.

"I had an idea you would be down here this morning, Mrs. Kirkland, and I have taken the great liberty of joining you."

There was no doubt about it: he was all broken up. I couldn't but feel sorry for him; he had always been nice to me.

"May I walk over as far as the Elevated with you?"

I had to do the talking, for he hadn't a word for himself, until we got into the car and I saw he was going along with me. Then he began to tell how fearfully he felt about my husband's misfortune.

"So badly, so dreadfully, that I haven't dared to approach his wife."

I told him that it was all over, anyway, and that we had both of us forgotten about the failure.

"But I haven't forgotten it, and there's no use of your saying that you have, Mrs. Kirkland, for you never will."

I told him honestly that I could forget the money part—the

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

money hadn't ever been a real thing. "As far as money goes for me, I have only had to think about the dollars I earned myself. I'm not up on the fortunes that come without hard work."

Mr. Sinclair interrupted: "Very well, then you *can* forget, but you can't forgive. Isn't that true?"

His voice was as funereal as his black clothes, and as tragic as though every one in the world were dead and he was the mourner for them all, and I just couldn't turn on him harshly and say: "Yes, you are right. I can never forgive the moral part of it." Nevertheless, I knew perfectly well that this was the time for me to speak and to clear his influence right out of my husband's life. I wondered how I could protect Mr. Kirkland without wounding Mr. Sinclair. He carried a cane with an ivory handle, and leaned on it, looking at me in such an intense way that I thought all of a sudden what Miss Pagee had said to me about Sinclair, and I reddened up like fire.

"You don't answer me," he said, earnestly. "Can you forgive me?"

If I said yes, then he would be up to the house that very night, and my husband would be sucked in deeper than ever.

"Why don't you get some work to do? Why don't you go out West to some ranch? Lots of men are going West now."

He smiled very slowly, and it wasn't a bit like Mr. Kirkland's smile, which was sunny and boylike.

"The farther the better?" he asked, very sadly. "Is *that* all you have to say to me?"

There was nobody in our car. Fanny's ship had sailed early. Mr. Sinclair had stuck his cane in the holes of the car mat and looked down at it very hard. Then he said,

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

speaking down to the point of his cane, as though it were another human being:

"When I first saw you at Trinity, the morning of your marriage, when Kirk did me the honor to let me be his best man, I knew that you would pull Kirk out. Stand by Kirk—he is worth it. I know him better than anybody else does, perhaps, and he's worth it, although probably nobody else will ever tell you so, my dear lady. *My dear lady*"—very gently and softly. He took his silk hat off and wiped his forehead with a silk handkerchief. It was perfumed with violet essence. I saw there were drops of perspiration all across his brow like a little row of beads. Then he put his hat on and rose.

"Will you shake hands with me?"

"Why, of course." But I tried not to meet his eyes. We had come to the station before the one where I changed to go to Harlem. He held my hand very lightly for a minute and then let it go. I wanted to alter the state his mind was in, so I asked him if he had heard about Miss Pagee. He said, "Yes, of course; poor girl!—poor girl!" But he wouldn't get his thought on this a bit: he just looked at me in the most intense way, and, as the car slowed down, he said:

"I don't believe there's any limit to what you can do, except in my case," and he touched his breast. "There is a stone right here, and even your hand—your hand, my dear lady—couldn't roll it toward the West."

While I was wondering what to make out of him, anyway, he turned and went right out of the car, but he stood on the platform until my train started out again from the station, his silk hat in his hand, and the other hand stuck in the breast of his black coat, as though it were over the stone.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

I waved to him and smiled, but he stood stock-still like a statue and just bowed his head to me.

It gave me a perfectly awful, ghostly feeling—perfectly awful! I didn't know what to do, and it wouldn't have surprised me a single bit if he had jumped on the track after our train had gone and let the next train pass over him. I didn't dare to look in the paper for suicides for days.

Once my husband said, a few weeks later:

"Poor old Sin doesn't dare come here any more, Esther. He has an idea that you have taken a dislike to him, and that he is to blame for all my losses. I wish you would write him a line and ask him up. I assure you he will never come until you do."

"Then Mr. Sinclair will never come."

And he never did.

CHAPTER XXX



Y husband didn't want me out of his sight. He told me everything. He was Senator Roxburg's private secretary, and they raised his salary after the first few months to a hundred and fifty dollars a month. For a long time he never touched a drop of anything, and grew brighter and more cheerful and more absorbed in his work. One day he left me in the morning nervous and irritable. He found fault with everything, with the coffee and the rolls, and I had to make him some cocoa over the alcohol-lamp, and he drank that up in our room. When he went out it seemed as though some kind of a storm had passed through the rooms. Just at twelve o'clock one of my bad headaches came on, and I was getting ready to lie down when a boy brought me up a note from his office. It read:

"Please come down immediately and fetch my green umbrella."

For a second I thought to myself, why, I will just give it to this boy and say I have got an awful headache; but instead I got up and dressed, and it was one of those hot days that come in October just before winter. I could hardly see what I put on, but I succeeded in fastening up my hair and getting a hat pinned on, and I took the umbrella and went down to Nassau Street. When I reached the office I had to wait in the stenographers' room for half an hour. They told

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

me that Mr. Kirkland was in with Mr. Roxburg. Here I listened to the click of the Remingtons, and it was like music to me. Mr. Kirkland came in and beckoned me to go into the office. Mr. Roxburg had just left, and my husband was alone in an elegant room. He was tired and excited, but I was glad to see that he was all right.

"I have been in this infernal cage for four hours without moving," he said, "and every now and then I hear a whistle from the Bay that tells me that some boat is off for France or England."

He then walked over to the window and sat down at Mr. Roxburg's table and began to sort letters.

I handed out the umbrella to him.

"Here is what you asked for," I said, and he looked up.

"My umbrella," he repeated, staring at it, and he laughed out loud. "And you have actually brought it down! You are adorably literal, my dear girl!" He got up, though still laughing. "An umbrella on a glorious golden October day?"

"Didn't you want it?"

"No," he said, "of course not."

I stood there holding it out, and, for the first time since I had left my own house in Brackettsville when Fanny made a fuss, I was angry—very, very angry.

"Then it was a joke on me."

When I saw how bright my husband's face was, for he kept on smiling, I just forced back that awful fury. It was lucky for me that I did, because my husband came up and took the umbrella out of my hands and put it on the table, and took hold of my arm and looked at me.

"In this case the umbrella is what the French would call

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

a *piège*, my dear girl. *I wanted to look at you, that was all—that was all.*"

And he did look at me. And a feeling I had never known with him began to come over me, but it died at once like a little thing that hadn't time to grow or live. I saw my husband's expression change like lightning, and I understood—it was only *the trouble* pursuing him.

"That's all right; I didn't mind coming down. But I really did think you wanted the umbrella, for you said so."

He turned around again to his work.

"I am afraid you will have to excuse me, Esther," he said, formally. "I shall be occupied until late to-night classifying these papers."

I went, of course. I don't think I had been with him ten minutes, but I was glad that I had gone down, for it turned out that what he wanted was to look at me—to be sure I was somewhere where he could call on me.

I don't begin to say right here that he was not an autocrat and that he didn't love to exercise his rights. I don't say that it didn't appear to be a selfish, tyrannical thing to do, and I dare say that there isn't a strong-minded woman who wouldn't laugh at me or who wouldn't swear that she would see her husband further before she would go to him like a messenger boy! I didn't look at it that way, that's all. He needed me and I felt it, through that short note he sent up to One Hundred and Eleventh Street, and I knew it when he looked into my face. That's the truth.

And he came home that night at midnight, perfectly tired out and exhausted, but himself, and there was no horror between us—nothing but his great fatigue.

CHAPTER XXXI



R. COLLINS was from Nevada, an ardent politician and perfectly delightful. He got my husband into Senator Roxburg's office, in spite of anything that might have been said about his habits, and Mr. Kirkland began, heart and soul, as warmly as he had gone into finance, to go into politics.

Senator Roxburg, of Wisconsin, was an enemy of Senator Bellars, and I really think he gave Mr. Kirkland the position of secretary just to annoy his uncle. My husband's salary was raised to thirty-five hundred dollars a year, with a promise of a rise if he should go to Washington with his chief. As it was, Mr. Kirkland took charge of the New York office. Like many other politicians, Senator Roxburg was a financier and a promoter of railroad interests, as well.

Nobody looked nicer than Mr. Kirkland did going off in the morning, when he would let me brush him off, put his tie straight, and see that he had gloves. It didn't do much good, though, for he never wore them. He would buy a pair, and they'd soon be reduced to just one, all smelling of tobacco and wrinkled up, and when he took to rolling his own cigarettes for a while he used to use his gloves for *tobacco pouches*, and one night one fell out on the parlor floor when the gentlemen were there. I was awfully ashamed, but they seemed to think it was a sign of genius, and Seth Collins said:

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"Does Kirk ever show any signs of genius excepting his eccentricities, Mrs. Kirkland?"

Then Mr. Holmes asked me quite seriously where I thought Mr. Kirkland's talents lay; and when I looked up to answer I was just going to say something funny when I caught sight of my husband's face, and his eyes fixed on me as though he really waited to see what I would answer—as though he cared; and I understood that he would never forget what I said then. I thought of the manuscript lying down deep in my trunk—the drama that Holmes had refused—I thought of his financial failure, and now of this third venture, and I knew, if I went back to any of the other things, he would be discouraged. There was the law, of course; he hadn't tried that, or the ministry; but I believed that he was capable of going on and trying them all and of being bright in them all, too, and I made up my mind now to stick where we were. I said:

"Why, I think his genius lies in politics."

And Mr. Holmes exclaimed warmly, though he was a cold man, "I am sorry to hear you say that. I want your husband to write a novel—a new book."

And this gave me a sharp pain. Mr. Holmes blinked at me through his double glasses. I knew as well as he did that my husband was a born author and a born poet, but they are so unlucky—nearly always.

Mr. Collins exclaimed: "You are perfectly right, Mrs. Kirkland! Kirk has found his rut, and I hope he'll stick there."

Those were just the words I had used in my own mind.

My husband had glanced from face to face, like a boy at his examination, to see what each gentleman thought, and

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

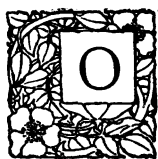
he appeared relieved. One of the others, who was a lawyer in a successful firm, asked my husband directly:

"How do you feel about it, Kirk?"

And he answered: "Gentlemen, whatever my wife says *goes*. She is the wisest little woman in the world!"

And I was very much embarrassed and a little ashamed, for I knew it hadn't been wisdom, but plain common sense.

CHAPTER XXXII



ONE evening when my husband had failed to come home to dinner, as I sat up-stairs in my slippers before the register, he stamped in at seven-thirty, his hat and overcoat still on, his face dark and heavy—the old trouble lying there.

“Esther,” he asked, shortly, “how long will it take you to get ready to go to the theatre?”

Another time I would have been perfectly delighted; since our marriage he hadn’t asked me to go to a show or any place of amusement — indeed, he had seen so much all his life he didn’t care any more for amusements; but his face this night didn’t suggest a pleasure spree. I hesitated.

“If you can get ready in five minutes we’ll go; otherwise I’ll take a turn around alone.”

“I will be ready.”

People usually like to put on nice things for the theatre, but I grabbed a jacket and a hat and a tippet, while he stood there in the doorway, staring straight before him. I dragged out some gloves, and when I went to put them on on the stairs found they were both for one hand. As I was, so we went, and so fast I could hardly keep up with Mr. Kirkland; but not until we got over to the cars did I realize that I had on my bedroom slippers and that it was January and freezing. Why I didn’t take cold right there and have pneumonia

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

I don't know, but I didn't. My husband never spoke to me until we got into the Academy of Music and were in our places. They were in the front row. The performance was *Erminie*, and my husband was awfully taken with the operetta. He enjoyed it as a boy might have done, and smiled and laughed and applauded until we were conspicuous. I thought it was a bright, pretty piece, and that the chorus-girls were lovely and awfully immodest. At the end of the first act my husband said:

"Esther, notice the girl on the end—that ideal creature with the rosebud mouth and the divine figure."

She *was* pretty as a picture, and at Mr. Kirkland's attention she smiled. He never took his eyes off her, and talked about her all through the play and called her "Hebe," and said, "A man could float to heaven on that girl's grace."

I didn't want to be *mean*, but I didn't think any man would float in that direction with an *Erminie* chorus-girl.

The next night we went to see *Erminie* again. Stephen telephoned me to meet him at the theatre, and we had the same seats. It was pretty enough to see twice, but after we had seen it four times I began to get sick of *Erminie*. However, it still amused my husband, and after a time he paid no attention to the show, and only stared and stared at that one pretty girl. He called her Helen when he spoke of her—her name was Pearley Drew on the bill—and once he said to me between the acts:

"Is that the face that launched a thousand ships?"

And I answered that I guessed so. Pearley Drew was pretty enough to set a good many things afloat.

We saw Erminie every night for six weeks!

We had the same places always, and everybody grew to know us at the theatre. The ushers called my husband Mr.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

Kirkland; he tipped everybody, and, of course, Pearley Drew knew us intimately. But I am sure she thought my husband a lunatic and me his nurse.

He never saw her once off the stage. That was the curious part of it.

Of course, as I sat there I got to thinking about other things, and did up accounts, and lots of times I dozed off to sleep.

Six weeks!

Don't talk to *me* about the theatre! I knew every line of that piece by heart; and most of the time my husband never thought of the show or anything.

One night he said: "Helen is getting thin; her cheeks have lost that divine curve. Esther, don't you think her beauty has worn off?"

And I answered that I didn't wonder it had worn off after "*launching a thousand ships*," and he laughed heartily.

"You remember that? The quotation is from Marlowe's *Faustus*—a great work of art, by-the-way." He got up out of his seat—this was between the acts. "Come, Esther, come," he said, and walked us out of the theatre as fast as possible. I can't say that I was sorry to leave *Erminie*, but I was troubled about him—the spell was broken.

CHAPTER XXXIII



AFTER this he grew terribly melancholy, and it was fearful to watch him fighting all alone, in silence and in the dark, and yet I never spoke to him about his battle.

One morning after breakfast he said:

"It is astonishing how cruel a good woman can be. Isn't it?"

I supposed he meant me, and answered that I didn't know I was either the one or the other.

He was tying on a new cravat, blue, with a little white dot in it. It was Sunday morning, and the morning papers were all scattered around the room.

"You are good to *me*, my dear girl. But I think that, as far as the rest of the world goes, you don't care a hang what happens to it, do you?"

"What do you want me to do for somebody?" I asked him, and he turned around quickly.

"What do *I* want? There it is! Why, my dear girl, you will make me a colossal egotist yet!"

Then he told me Mr. Sinclair was ill—had been perfectly miserable for a long time, disheartened and dispirited—and that he had come into Mr. Kirkland's office once or twice, and my husband was worried about him.

"He is hard up and broken up, Esther—for your sake I have been a fiend to poor old Sin."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

Coming as this did on the back of my husband's melancholy, it troubled me, and I asked him again what he wanted me to do, and he replied, severely:

"I want you to do as your heart dictates."

And I thought for a little while, and then I replied:

"I have done that already."

He was angry, and went on to say that women were cruel and full of prejudices, and that he prayed to be delivered from a woman's judgment, and that as far as he was concerned he was going over to Brooklyn to see Mr. Sinclair.

I took my hat and coat and told him I was going, too. It was a bitter March day, windy and dull, and the trip long and cold. My husband, however, took it as an excursion, and was gay and cheerful.

"Poor old Sin! He will be wild with pleasure to receive this embassy of peace. He has been eating his heart out over your disapproval and over his own hard luck."

Then once more he said as we went along: "I'm afraid Sin is very hard up these days. I have an idea that he is quite poor."

Over in Brooklyn we took a hack, for we didn't know where to find the street, and were horrified when it turned out to be an alley lined with tenement-houses, and could scarcely believe that a gentleman lived there, and, when we stopped in front of the number Sinclair had given, we couldn't think it was true. The door was wide open, and a woman and a man talked together on the stoop.

"Mr. Sinclair?" my husband asked.

The woman stared at us. "Are *you* his brother?"

"No, his best friend."

"Well," said the woman, "you're too late. He died yesterday."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

It went all through me that it was my fault for being so hard and so cruel.

We asked if we could go up-stairs.

"Yes, right up to his room on the next floor," the woman said.

The room was bare and poor. Poor Mr. Sinclair lay there in the coffin in the middle of the room, the gas turned low and the shades drawn. It was piercing, icy, dreadfully cold. There was nothing but his bed and bureau and a couple of chairs and a wash-stand—not even a trunk of clothes in the place.

My husband gazed at Mr. Sinclair for a long time. His face was thin and drawn, but quite peaceful. He didn't look to me as much like a dead man as he did that day on the "L" station platform. The woman, who had stayed in the room with us, said to us:

"He told me his brother would come on from Milwaukee, but no one has ever showed up. He owed me two months' rent."

"Why didn't you let his friends know?" my husband asked. He could hardly speak.

"Why, he told me he didn't have any friends, sir, and I believed him. He never had any money, and sold all his clothes—his trunk, too."

I stood by my husband; I was afraid he would fall, shaking as he did, white as the dead man. He walked over to the bureau-drawers and opened them. Every one was empty except for a little packet which my husband took up. The woman didn't care. "Nothing of value," she kept saying. My husband put the envelope in his pocket defiantly, and the landlady seemed afraid of him.

"If you have robbed this man," Mr. Kirkland said, in a

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

dreadful voice, "don't think to escape. I will have you put in the penitentiary for life."

"Robbed him! I haven't, indeed, sir; he owes me money. He hadn't many things, but what he did have he sold, and he wouldn't take anything from us—he was too proud."

"What do you mean?" my husband asked. "What kind of *things* do you speak of?"

And she said, as if she were ashamed, "Why, *food*, and like that."

"Do you *mean*—?" my husband murmured, and the woman replied:

"He was often hungry—you may say he starved to death. That's what the doctor told us when the pneumonia set in."

My husband gripped the stand and cried out:

"My God! Sin!—Sin!" and he burst into tears. The woman slipped out here and left us, and after a little the quiet calmed my husband and he wiped his eyes and handed me the packet without a word. They were letters from my husband to Mr. Sinclair, written from Paris, and a little picture of me that I had given my husband and which he thought he had lost.

He didn't breathe a word of reproach to me, but, when he went back to the side of Mr. Sinclair's coffin, murmured, "This is a mission of peace, old man—a mission of peace!" And he said other things that I couldn't hear.

Down-stairs he made the arrangements with the woman, and paid her everything, and, in the Elevated on the way home, under his breath he murmured:

"Starved to death! My God!" He turned to me and said, violently, "Think of it!—*think* of it!"

"No," I begged him, "don't—he wouldn't want us to.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

He didn't give any trouble to any one, and he wanted it that way."

He left me at the Fiftieth Street junction and said he wanted to walk in the Park, and I understood he wished to be alone and think, and, honestly, I didn't dare follow him. As it was, I went home perfectly used up and sick at heart. That was Sunday night, and I never saw or heard from my husband for three days.

CHAPTER XXXIV



URING that wait Mrs. Howland, our landlady, came in to me and said:

"Mrs. Kirkland, I have been through the same mill; only *my* husband wasn't a gentleman, and it was harder. Let me help you."

We went out together, she and I, and we went everywhere that either of us thought he might be. She wouldn't let me tell the police, and she made me understand that times like these come to every man who drinks as my husband did. I told them down at the office that he was ill.

At the end of the third day he came in and stood in the doorway, a wreck of himself—his eyes staring and his beard grown. I really only knew him by his voice.

"Just let me get to bed," he said, "and send for some black coffee and some cigarettes; will you be so good?"

He was sick in bed a week, and got up feverish, nervous, and shaking, and went down to his work like a man out of the hospital. I nursed him as one would a baby, and read the papers to him. He didn't show any desire to keep in touch with what was going on. He only wanted his attention held, that was all.

He went on like this week after week, but his mind was so strong that he stood it perfectly wonderfully, and with a day or two of rest in our room he would be able to go back.

I never said anything. I never knew what to say. It was

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

too sad to me, and I wasn't sure what would be the good of speaking to a man like Mr. Kirkland, a man so cultured and so clever—knowing the world and having travelled everywhere. He must have known all the things I could say, by heart. We never referred to it. In the daytime I used to think up all kinds of different advice to give him and things to suggest, but when he came in and wasn't himself, of course I couldn't speak then, and the day after I was too busy amusing him and reading to him and keeping up his spirits.

During his sickness he asked me, "Where's the picture of the Hebe we used to see dance in *Erminie*?"

I got out the photograph. He had me get out a lot more actresses' pictures which he had bought in Paris and London, and he looked them over, smoking, sitting up in bed, and he told me a lot of stories about the actresses and seemed quite carried back to his old life.

"I guess you like foreign travel pretty well," I remarked, and he answered sharply:

"Just as one *likes* the Sphinx, Esther! You confuse your values." But after a minute he added, "I never want to see the Continent again."

As to where my husband spent those dreadful three days he never told me, and he never referred to Mr. Sinclair by name. While he was sick Mr. Roxburg sent a man up to see him every day or so, and they talked together about some matters my husband had charge of, and I never was so astonished—or I guess I had better say *proud*—as when I heard Mr. Kirkland talk.

I got him sitting propped up by his pillows and a nice jacket on, and he had been shaved and looked thin but pretty well, and he talked to the man from Senator Roxburg

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

so fast and authoritatively. It was about the silver question, and Senator Roxburg and Senator Brice and a lot of others were interested in it, and, when my husband had finished what he had to say, the man told him, "It's a pity you couldn't draft out what you have been saying, Mr. Kirkland."

And my husband laughed and said:

"For Roxburg to use? When I write down what I say I shall be in the Senate myself, Mr. Guffy."

I watched Mr. Guffy's face as he took down a few notes, and I knew that he thought my husband would be in an inebriate asylum before he ever stood in the United States Senate, and it made me perfectly furious.

"I understand that you have been secretary for my uncle, Senator Bellars, Mr. Guffy," my husband said. "He is a good master but a damned poor relation; but a relation once removed *always* removed, as far as I am concerned."

The following day he was down in his office, and the strain of the new work and the accumulation of old work was too much for him. He wasn't himself any of the time hardly, and I knew he wouldn't be able to keep his position long. He didn't send for me to go down-town any more. He gave his time up to the office and to drink. His splendid mind and splendid spirits all seemed just to stand there and watch him go down into ruin. It was hard for a wife to bear.

I was sure it was my fault.

I passed Senator Bellars on the corner of our street late one afternoon. I don't know why he was up-town there, but he cut me, and I felt that he had a right to.

One night after Mr. Guffy had left and we were sitting there before turning the light up, Mr. Kirkland began under his breath to recite a little. I couldn't hear very well,

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

and I didn't like to speak, but he quoted, all at once: "*I am the Resurrection and the Life.*" What a wonderful assertion! What an *illuminating* assertion! At the entrance of the Rural Cemetery in Albany they have put the figure of a splendid angel with that line along its base. The Sinclair plot is there." That was his first and only mention of Mr. Sinclair.

I hated to look the boarding-house people in the face; I knew they were sorry for me, and Mrs. Howland herself was the only one I spoke to.

Several times messages came up from the office to me, and now I just hoped and hoped that he would ask me to go down even with an "umbrella," so that I might feel of some use.

Finally, one day he *did* send up-town for me and told me to come in a carriage and wait for him at the door of the Equitable Building at two. It was a rare thing for us to take a carriage, and I was glad that I could be of some use. I enjoyed the ride down, and, though the streets were blocked, I was early, and at two I sent in word to him to say that I was there, and he sent out instructions that I was to wait.

So I did.

Mr. Collins came along and saw me, and stopped to speak to me. By his voice I could tell that he was sorry for me, too, and I took a dislike to him.

At half-past three I sent in again and they brought word that I was to wait.

I waited in front of that office door five hours, and when at length I went in myself they seemed surprised to see me. My husband had been gone a long time—he had gone out of the office another way.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

I didn't expect to find him at the house, and he wasn't there, and I began the long, dreadful wait again. But this time, at the end of the second day, I told Mrs. Howland:

"I am going to start alone this time. If he comes back before I do, be good to him, will you?"

"Where, for God's sake," she asked me, "are you going to begin?"

And I said: "I have an idea that he has gone up to Albany to the cemetery where Mr. Sinclair is buried. I think there is something sort of calls him, and I am going there."

CHAPTER XXXV



On the way to Albany I *made up my mind*.

It seemed right for me to do just as I was going to do, and I decided that if I found Mr. Kirkland here it was to show me that I was being led in the right way. I can't say why I ever thought of Albany, but the idea came to me like an inspiration. I took a hack at the station, and drove up to the cemetery. It was a glorious day, bright and sunny, as though there were no hard things to bear in the world and no places laid out like cemeteries in lovely parts of the country. The air was good to breathe after months in New York, and as I drove out of Albany into the country it made me think that perhaps, after all, right here in Albany, I could put an end to my unhappiness and get a little peace out of life. I had reached my limit. There was the truth of it. Everybody can go just so far, and then they *snap*.

At the cemetery gate I told the driver to wait for me, and I went in on foot. Little children's graves with white lambs on the stones, and crosses and garlands all covered with names I did not know, shone around whitely in the green plots, and I wondered if the "Esthers" who had come to rest here had brought such failures as I had. On one of the little stones it said:

In memory of Bobby, a good little child.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

The date was fifty years ago, and I couldn't but think that "the good little child" was better off to have died small than to have lived to lie in a larger bed at the end when nobody could write "good" on the stone.

Of course, it was silly and morbid—a cemetery isn't a very cheerful place at any time, and when I had reached the Sinclair plot I felt ready to lie down myself, and to give up the problem. The square was hedged in by box, and there was only one grave, freshly turfed, not marked by any stone. I don't know why, but I expected to see my husband in that special place. Mr. Sinclair's lonely grave chilled me through.

For a little while I waited there, thinking about my husband's friend, and I saw some scraps of paper on the ground, and wasn't surprised to recognize Mr. Kirkland's writing. Only a few lines of poetry on a sheet of the Hotel Delavan paper, and one ran:

"Beyond the pale dead ranks of men's desires,
Beyond the petty, proud disturbances . . ."

And Mr. Sinclair seemed to be just this that my husband had written. On another paper was drawn a square, as though it were meant for a tombstone, and under it:

"Even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea . . ."

Sad and desolate as it all was, and pleading to me for forgiveness for the dead and for the living, I was hard—hard—and my heart was cold and tired, and when I reached the Delavan House and asked for Mr. Kirkland's room and they showed me up to it, I was as indifferent to the fact that

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

I had found my husband as if he had been a total stranger.

There was no answer to my knock, but the door wasn't locked, and I went in. He was in the dressing-room beyond; he had taken a suite of rooms and bath, and he was washing his face, his collar off and a towel in his hand. He stood stock-still and stared at me, pale as death, unkempt and rough-looking, ill and thin, but he was *himself*.

"I never was so glad to see anybody in my life!" he cried. "How wonderful of you, my dear girl, to come here like this! No one but you in the world would have contrived it."

He came back into the room, with his hand out to me, and smiling just as naturally as if we had parted the day before.

I sat down by a table in the middle of the room, and did not notice his hand. I knew if I didn't speak out fast and well that it would be all up with me, that the moment would pass and I would be caught again in the trap of fate as tight as ever before, so I said:

"I didn't have any trouble to find you, for I recollected that you had said something about Mr. Sinclair's grave. I guess it drew you here. I knew you would come up here some day or other, and I was right."

He frowned—he never liked the I's dotted, and it was the first time in our married life that I had let him see that I really knew everything that went on.

His face darkened, and I understood, then, that I had done right in not ever "preaching" at him; it would have been an end long ago of him and of me.

"I'm glad you are *all right*," I said, "and that I found you here alone like this, for I've quite a good deal to say."

He took his coat, put it on; then he dragged it off again

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

and found his vest, and put that on; lifted the hair-brush, laid it down, and didn't brush his hair. He came and planted himself in front of me, his hands in his pockets and a funny expression on his face—rather amused and curious. All went very fast, for I didn't mean that he should break in with clever words and phrases, to put me off the track and frighten me by his intellect.

"I've thought a lot these last few days about what your uncle said—Senator Bellars told me that I would 'ruin' you. As it has turned out, he was right. I'm sorry I didn't listen to him then." The words I said, as soon as they began to be real truth, grew so big in my mouth that they choked me, and they came faster than my breath came—I *was* frightened to death—I couldn't go on!

My husband said, coldly: "Your mention of my uncle is particularly interesting just now. I fail to see what anybody on God's earth has to do with husband and wife—with you or me."

"Gracious!" I told myself, "I've begun wrong!"

"Perhaps they haven't anything to do with us, but I'm not the kind of a woman for you, and that is clear."

He walked over to the bureau and brushed his hair this time—brushed it hard and arranged it very carefully; but his hands trembled so that he dropped the brush. I thought I'd pick it up and give it to him; then decided to leave it alone—so it lay there. My husband returned to my side and stared down at me, his face as stern as a judge's; but it was a wonderful thing that in the short time between the bureau and the table his expression had changed—changed forever, as though some heavenly wave had washed it clean.

"I think I'm safe in saying, Esther," my husband said, "that you're the woman of the fewest words in my experi-

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

ence, and to me your silence has been *deep gold to the core*—it has made a species of atmosphere in which unconsciously I have existed—eaten, slept, dreamed, worked—and I expect you will let me say it—*drunk*.” (His lips trembled, and the hand that he put up to touch them trembled more. I had no feelings—anyhow, whatever came to me then like sentiment or kindness I crowded back—back, saying, “Remember the horrible, horrible days you’ve gone through. It will be good to be free.” And I watched him calmly and kept saying to myself: “Now, in just a few moments more, I will go out and never see him again.”) He went on: “Now that you have spoken, however, Esther, it is to the point and tremendous. I’m to understand you’ve come up here to find me and tell me you are going to leave me?”

And I said, “Yes.”

His mouth gave an awful twitch. He walked back to the bureau and took out from the drawer a collar this time and a cravat, but couldn’t put them on. Many times I had helped him when he was nervous and trembling, but this time I let him fumble and try: any other man would have cursed. He finally let both the collar and the cravat fall to the floor, came back and sat down by the table and took out a box of cigarettes from his vest—the packet was empty; he let that fall.

I didn’t say a single word, and was growing disappointed with myself not to be able to find the right thing for the time. I wanted to tell him that I was an utter failure, but I hadn’t the heart to mention myself. He was trying to sit up and pull himself together, and after a second asked, very politely:

“Is that all you have to say, Esther?”

“Yes, I guess that’s all.”

And he went on: “I don’t blame you in the least—not in



HE BADE ME GOOD-BYE, NOT MEETING MY EYES

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

the least. You have right, reason, and common sense on your side."

I had turned to stone, and he didn't even touch my pity, but only recalled things that hurt and disgusted me—hours of waiting and wretched fear and pain. When I got up finally, he asked:

"Are you going *now*?"

"The night boat leaves at six—I want to catch that."

Remaining where he was in his chair he held out his hand and bade me good-bye, not meeting my eyes.

I touched his hand; it was as cold as ice. When I had reached the door and I saw that I was *really free* and that he was going to let me go without an effort to keep me, I took courage. I went down-stairs and out of the hotel. As I got my bag in the parcel-room I was glad I hadn't spent a night in Albany, and I tried to realize how glad his uncle would be to take him back again, and I thought that he could get a divorce from me for desertion, and marry some clever woman who would succeed where I had failed.

It was a long time before the boat left, and I walked slowly down to the pier. Albany was quiet and calm. I knew I had turned over a great big page in my life. I sat out on the deck and watched the view in the sunset, but I was as high strung as though I had a fever, and realized it when I went to my cabin and laid down. I couldn't sleep, and toward midnight opened my shutter wide. We were far down the river, and the stars were setting, and it was lovely and still. Try as hard as I could, I couldn't think of any existence without my husband.

CHAPTER XXXVI



DECIDED to go to Harlem, pack my trunk, and have it carried down to the station for Brackettsville, where the boys were boarding, going in and out to New York to their work. I had been a mender, a seamstress, a tailor—and I had failed. As for being a *wife*—well, he hadn't wanted *that!*—I hadn't been that, oh no, *no!*

I went up-stairs without seeing any one, and opened my door. The room was full of smoke, and sitting in the window was my husband! I hadn't crossed the threshold before he jumped up, locked the door, and stood against it. My first thought was, "He is going to kill me—they often do." Then I called myself a fool and looked at him, and saw that he had no pistol in his hand. He had on his best clothes, his hair was closely cut, and he had *shaved his beard*. He was to me a *strange* stranger, but somehow a new *old* stranger, and then I said to myself that *I* was "going crazy!"

"Esther, sit down in that chair—sit down, my dear girl."

I did so to save time. He came over, and kneeled down and unbuttoned my boots and took them off. I couldn't stop him. He put my slippers on my feet, and I couldn't stop him. He took out my hat-pins, and took my hat off gently and laid it on the bed. He was terribly excited, although quiet and wonderfully gentle.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"Listen to me, Esther—*listen!* Of course, I took the first train, and I ran like a lion to guard his lair! I was sure you'd come home some time or other, and I should have sat in that window, if necessary, until my beard had grown to the floor! The reason I let you go last night was because I was coming here to meet you, and I could bear it!" He touched his face where he had shaved his beard.

"How do you like it, Esther?"

Oh, I couldn't answer him! It was all I could do to keep my balance, but he asked me this question over so many times that I answered, without thinking:

"Why, I'll have to get used to it."

And he exclaimed, delighted: "You *shall* get used to it! You shall! Look at me," he ordered like a master, and made me meet his eyes; his own were clear like brown pools, and there were tears back of the shine. I hoped he wasn't going to cry—I couldn't have stood it.

"In Albany you said that you came to tell me that you were not the kind of a woman for me, and I ran to New York to tell you that you *are* the one kind of woman I want, even if you haven't been able to find *the man* in *me!* Any other woman in the world but you would have put me in a strait-jacket a year ago. Your courage, your divine patience, have not been in vain."

But I hadn't been through what I had been or up to Albany to say what I had for nothing, and, watching my face and not finding what he wanted there, he said, more excitedly:

"It isn't my nature to make a lot of threats about what I shall do if you leave me. I understand your character too well to imagine that if you do leave me you will care what I do or where I go. I don't put a pistol to my head. It's not my way."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

He leaned over to me and said, very low: "*I'm just going to say one word*" . . .

With all my might I longed to tell him *not* to go on; that I was determined—determined to leave him and lead my own life; but it was growing harder every single second, and the longer he looked at me out of his changed eyes the more impossible it was for me to speak.

" . . . *Wait!*" he whispered, down deep, as if it came from his heart. "*Wait!* You've done a great deal for me—it's my turn. I promise nothing—I assure nothing—but I want to see what I *can* do—for you—*Wait!*" He looked as if he expected to show me a victory. "You don't understand what all this means, my dear girl—you don't, of course, understand."

He grew very pale, and put his hand up to his hair and bit his lips a little, and then said, slowly:

"It will be a hard, hard fight."

"No," I said, "I *don't* understand how any living man can be so sure of himself."

And he answered me: "*Because I am sure of my wife.*"

I didn't answer. For a while I looked out of our window over toward the river. There were two black yachts going down toward the bay. I watched them going around the curve of the hill. I heard my husband's voice:

"Can't I touch you, Esther? Won't you call up all the imagination you have and understand the importance of this moment?"

And I recollected that he called me cruel once, and said that I was cruel to everybody but to him, so I was just real mean and said: "You have told me lots of times that I have no imagination—nothing but common sense."

He exclaimed, eagerly: "There's no place for common

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

sense here now; it has its value, but common sense would make you deaf and dumb to me, and I'm afraid of it. All I ask you to do is to imagine the enormity and the importance of the moment."

Oh, of course I understood what he meant, and that to reach this point meant a new life for him! And I tried to say: "For me a new life as well."

After a second he whispered: "Just where *are* you in your well-ordered, well-regulated mind, my dear girl?"

I didn't know he had such a voice as the one he spoke to me in. I was surprised to see him kneel down by my side. I was embarrassed; he was so changed by his shaven face and his close-cut hair, it was like a strange man. The wave that had touched him in Albany seemed to have gone all over him and washed him clean. But I held back from him, I didn't want him to touch me then. I was too full 'way down deep of something else that I should have to bury, cover over, forget; and he showed his good sense—he didn't touch me; he had such perfect taste and feeling about everything when he was himself. I knew then that I was seeing him as other women had seen him, who had been carried away by him and charmed by him, and it gave me a new idea of my husband. It was a little bit the way I felt that day down in Nassau Street, when I carried him his umbrella and he took hold of my arm and looked at me. But I thought to myself: "If he *kisses* me or says anything sentimental, I can't bear it!" But he just knelt there quietly, and leaned his head against the arm of my chair.

The noon whistles blew all over the river and from the factories, and I saw my bag over there on the bed, and knew I should unpack it and begin again. Then my husband got up and said to me:

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"Before you came in I paid up Mrs. Howland's bill. I told her we were going away this afternoon. She took me for a new lodger when I came in without my beard. We are going down to Washington. I have telegraphed for rooms at the Shelburne Hotel. Mr. Roxburg is down there, and I join him to-morrow."

I didn't say anything one way or another, but I got up and began to get ready to go down to lunch.

"How long will it take you to pack up, Esther?"

And I recollected how he had put the same question to me at Paul Smith's after the other tragedy, but I was hard yet—hard, and couldn't bring myself to make him any reply.

"The next train has a dining-car," he went on, as though he didn't expect me to answer him, "and if you could throw the things in, on a rush, why, I'd send for a cab immediately. I don't believe we care much about lunching here, Esther, do we?"

Then I understood that he was ashamed to meet Mrs. Howland and the others, and the stone broke in me a little, and I *felt sorry for him*. I told him I could get ready all right, and that he had better go and send for the cab right away.

What could I do? . . .

CHAPTER XXXVII



THINGS that flow along smoothly aren't so easy to recall as hard parts. In Washington we had rooms in a house in M Street. I didn't know a single soul, and hadn't anything to do, so I had time to remember Miss Pagee's nails, and I got a set of manicure things and did mine.

The first Sunday after we got to Washington my husband and I went to St. James's Church, as he said it was the thing to do. We sat up-stairs. It was a dark little church, with pretty windows and a beautiful organ playing. Senator Roxburg sat in a pew near the President. My husband pointed him out to me.

"Just across the aisle from Mr. Roxburg," my husband said, "sits his arch enemy. Can you see him, Esther?"

It was Senator Bellars. They were intoning the Creed. I always liked the Episcopal Creed and the service. We were married by it in Trinity, and my people had always been Episcopalians.

Senator Roxburg and Senator Bellars represented the two big factions in the Senate, and though they said the same things in church, they said very different ones outside, though they were both in the same party.

The church was packed full, and we sat in the far back and looked down on it all.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

They sang *The Church's One Foundation*, and it gave me a shaky feeling; I wished I could sing. I was surprised to hear Mr. Kirkland sing, holding the book up and singing right out as though he were a convert at a revival meeting. People near us turned and looked at him. He didn't seem to take any interest in the sermon. He didn't sing the last hymn, and I was relieved, because his voice was so loud in carrying.

On the way home my husband talked to me about his admiration for Senator Roxburg.

"It's the turn of the wheel, my dear girl; we were in the last row of the gallery to-day. Wait ten years. Roxburg can't get along without me—I won't let him. There's a talent in seizing opportunities, and I have gripped this one. Roxburg," my husband continued, "started in a grocer's store, and to-day he sways the Senate every time he speaks. I've run up constantly against my uncle, and he is as cold to me as death; but I have no favors to ask of him."

During that winter Mr. Kirkland brought me an invitation to the Roxburgs' for dinner. My husband lunched there every day himself, and several times he had stayed for dinner. As soon as I had read the invitation, he said to me:

"What shall you say?"

I looked up quickly at him. He was lighting a cigarette, and I thought his face was embarrassed. We'd been six months in Washington, and he hadn't touched a drop of anything but tea and coffee and ginger-ale. He was perfectly absorbed in his work, and toiled like a slave for Senator Roxburg. Nothing was too good or too great for my husband to do for his chief. Senator Roxburg all through this period was growing more and more prominent, his speeches were making him famous, and were the talk of Washington, and when Mr. Kirkland dined there he used to come home

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

and tell me all about the dinners; they must have been very brilliant and interesting, for he brought back a good deal of the sparkle to me.

So when he asked me, "What shall you say?" I answered, "Why, how do you mean?"

"I should rather have put it, I suppose, what shall you wear, Esther?"

I hadn't a thing but ordinary clothes (shirtwaists and skirts and a nice blue serge for church), and he knew it. I had never had a real evening-dress in my life. I saw right then and there that he didn't want me to go. It didn't hurt me in the way I think it would have hurt most women. We were standing in front of the glass. My husband had an elegant figure, even though he was thin and bowed a little, and now he was himself all the time. I don't believe in Washington there was a more distinguished-looking man of his age. He looked more like a titled man than anything else, and he had so much *manner*.

"I'll have to accept the invitation, I suppose," I said. "The last day I can have a bad headache. It is always easy."

I never saw such a look of relief as came over his face. I came near crying. It struck me so suddenly that there was a big difference between us.

My husband made me write the letter then and there. He had the note taken round by a messenger. The dinner was two weeks off.

From then on I read every society thing there was in the papers, and saw Mrs. Roxburg's name everywhere. My husband hadn't made any reference to her especially.

The boarding-house keeper knew everybody in Washington by name and by sight. One beautiful Sunday afternoon

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

Mrs. Margrette (her family had been French) and I went to St. James's to vespers. We sat up in the gallery again, but this time in the front row. There were just a few people there, and the choir-boys all came in singing *The Church's One Foundation*.

After the first prayer two people passed into the Roxburgs' seat—a tall, beautifully dressed woman with a sable around her neck and a great big muff; my husband was with her. He held her prayer-book for her, and all through the service he was devoted to her. He didn't sing *The Church's One Foundation* this time, or any other hymn, out loud.

Mrs. Margrette had bad eyesight, and she was as mad as a hornet to think she hadn't her "far-seeing glasses" with her, and I didn't tell her who I saw in the Roxburgs' pew. I held back, and waited until everybody had gone out before we came down-stairs.

All the way home I wondered how I was ever going to get along, and why anybody needed to be so firmly fixed in another's life that every turn makes them suffer, and yet there doesn't seem to be *any right way* out.

My husband sent word to the house he wouldn't be home for tea. Mrs. Margrette had her grandchildren with her, and we had codfish-balls and buckwheat-cakes for supper. I couldn't eat a single thing. That night I was reading some of the Sunday papers, and I came across a joke that said:

"Wives of great men oft remind us they should leave their wives at home."

And mad as I was and hurt as I was, and lonely, I laughed right out, and I said to myself: "Well, I guess that man

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

knew what he was talking about. But my husband isn't *great* yet, and it is too early to be left at home."

Anyhow, the dinner wasn't for two weeks, and I had plenty of time to study things out; but I couldn't think as I was in the habit of doing, for I had a new kind of feeling about Mr. Kirkland and Mrs. Roxburg, and it wasn't a bit the way I had felt about Miss Pagee or my sister. Each time it was different. Everything was different now in every way. My husband was a new man in some respects, and I was growing very different, too. Mr. Kirkland was more like the man I first saw in Senator Bellars's office the day he landed.

One day I went for a walk, and stayed down and ate luncheon in a cheap restaurant, because I didn't want to go back and sit there and eat biscuits and hash with Mrs. Margrette, and have her ask me questions. Being out alone like that made me think of old times, when I was a business woman and could do as I chose.

In front of the Library I came face to face with Senator Bellars. I never thought of speaking to him, but he laughed harshly and held out his hand, and asked me how I was and *where* I was. I could hardly speak. It was so sudden and so strange. He looked handsome and distinguished, and I was sorry we were on the other side of many things. He stared at me hard, and then said:

"I needn't ask how *you* are doing! You look very well. But your husband is making the usual fool of himself. Don't bristle; I won't run down your demi-god! It is none of my affairs, and I know from experience that I might as well talk into a phonograph as to talk to you. I only get my own words back again."

I was surprised when he asked me where I was going, and more so when he walked all the way home with me, talking

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

in an interesting manner; and if I hadn't been in my old suit I would have been proud to walk alongside of one of the most prominent Washington men.

"What on earth," he asked me, "ever possessed that jumping-jack of a nephew of mine to go to Roxburg?"

And when I answered that my husband admired Senator Roxburg immensely, Mr. Bellars fairly snorted:

"Roxburg is like a bit of tinfoil—you can crumple him into any shape you like. But his wife! Well, *there*, if you like, is a man, and she has her ambitions! You wouldn't think, would you, to see her, that she had been born in a mining-camp?"

When we got to the door of my boarding-house he looked at me very kindly and stood there with me, lingering.

"Some years ago I gave you some advice which you didn't take—well and good. I have been observing your husband's chief for some time, ever since he made that clever speech in the Republican Club in New York"—his eyes twinkled under his hanging eyebrows. "I wondered then who made that speech for Roxburg; it was beyond the intellect of his clever wife. Now I know. I've a lot of family pride which I have had the bad luck to see dragged in the gutter more than once by my kin. But when there is a chance for my pride to be touched it's as sensitive as ever, I find!"

We were standing in front of Mrs. Margrette's window, and I knew she was peeping through the crack between the shade and the pane. Senator Bellars tapped me on the arm. "I don't like to see the Kirkland intellect *feeding a hog*—it goes against the grain. I don't like the idea of basil-plants. I expect you know they are a kind of flower that grows on dead men's brains? As far as I am concerned, I don't ask

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

any brains but my own. They may be poor, but they are at least original."

I couldn't say a single word, because I thought he was perfectly fine, and I believed everything he said. It seemed like a great light that all of a sudden showed me the way.

Senator Bellars was staring right up at Mrs. Margrette's windows as he talked to me.

"Washington is all very well for some fellows to jump *from*—the most of them jump from here into oblivion. Now, for a man with brains and talent and ambition, Washington should be jumped into from another twig—I wonder if you understand me? It's family pride with me," he went on, "and it's maddening to think that the brains of my family are feeding the greed and avarice of an opponent. And what, in God's name, will Stephen get out of all this? Nervous prostration from overwork, possibly — when he has used up his talent or become a little too conspicuous he will get kicked out."

His eyes seemed to imprison me as he stood there, his hands in his pockets, his head bent, looking at me from under his shaggy eyebrows. In another tone he asked more kindly: "What are *you* doing here? How do you pass your time?"

I couldn't have told him how I passed it, for I didn't pass it, I just shoved it along to get rid of it.

"Come to my house and take some dictation from me," he suggested. "I don't happen to be so fortunate as to possess a private secretary on whose brains I feed. Come to-morrow." He took out his card and wrote his address on it. I shook my head and said I couldn't come possibly.

He didn't seem at all hurt by my refusal.

"Don't tell Stephen that we have met, please," he asked.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"I have spoken to you because you are a woman, and I like them all on principle. As for Stephen, he's the biggest fool with a mind that God ever made, and an angel couldn't save him from his follies."

By this time Mrs. Margrette had pulled the shade right up. I could tell it, though I was only turned sideways to it. She had gotten out her far-seeing glasses, and she was just staring.

Senator Bellars gave me his hand, and held mine warmly, and smiled right into my eyes.

"I believe no woman objects to being told that she is handsome. I hope Stephen tells you so often. You were always lovely, but you have improved vastly."

I saw him look at my clothes, and I knew what he thought about them, and I blushed dreadfully.

"I don't care a continental," he said, more coolly, "what Stephen Kirkland's wife looks like; that young man has finished himself for me. But I do care what my nephew's wife looks like. Go to a good dressmaker, my dear, get yourself a handsome gown, and send the bill to me."

I bade him good-bye, and when Mrs. Margrette let me in I didn't have time to ring—she was at the door.

"Well, Mrs. Kirkland, I never did! That was Senator Bellars, wasn't it? There aren't *two* men like him in Washington! Dear me, do you know him so well?"

Up-stairs in my room I was trembling like a leaf. I locked my door, and my face burned. I felt ashamed and pleased—ashamed and pleased—and comforted—and mad—and over all I was *just plain pleased*.

CHAPTER XXXVIII



RS. MARGRETTE told me a great deal about her French relations, so much so that once I asked if she talked French. I thought I would like to go on from where I had left off in New York, but she only knew "*Que voulez vous*" and one or two other things, and I knew those myself, and more.

My husband wanted me to look carefully over all his clothes. He had bought a handsome new dress-suit and shirt and collar buttons and studs in New York. He got half a dozen handkerchiefs, too, very fine, with his monogram. I had never seen any so expensive.

One afternoon I went up-stairs and found him standing in the window looking out, his hands in his pockets, and I knew by his back that something had gone wrong.

"Esther," he said, "I want you to go to the Roxburgs' dinner to-morrow." And he turned around square and looked at me half angrily; he was very much cut up.

I sat down on the bed, and before I could think twice he went on: "It's nonsense for you to refuse — Roxburg will think I'm ashamed of you. I've got a wife, haven't I? And that's all there is about it!"

I was perfectly struck dumb.

"What will you wear, Esther?" And then he answered himself: "Get up something or other. I don't care what.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

It's a matter of no importance what a secretary's wife wears. I'd chuck the whole thing here if it wouldn't show my hand. But dress as you will; I want you to dine in any case."

"I'll have to buy a dress, I guess. I haven't anything but my blue serge."

"Buy anything you choose—spend what you like."

I was determined that he shouldn't be any more ashamed of me than I could help. I asked Mrs. Margrette to go with me. She said her grandmother had been a dress-maker "under the Empire" and that she had always been told that she inherited "the French taste." I was very glad afterward that she had gone with me, for there were so many things to choose from. Mrs. Margrette took me to the swellest dressmakers in Washington, and they happened to have several ready-made evening-dresses that seemed too stylish and too queer for me, and I was scared to death at the very sight of every one of them! Mrs. Margrette appeared to be at home in the place, and said to the woman who was half-heartedly showing us things with her nose up in the air, and dragging the dresses around as if they were rags, looking out of the window indifferently most of the time:

"Have you anything from *Worth*, madam?"

The woman stared at her and repeated: "'Worth'? Why, yes, we have one model gown," and she brightened up a little and brought it out—a black dress embroidered with gold, simple and perfectly beautiful. The fitter thought it would just fit me, as I was "the model size." That was news to me! They made me go into the little room, and I tried the dress on, and Mrs. Margrette said: "Well, if it doesn't fit you to a T, Mrs. Kirkland! I never knew what

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

a handsome woman you were before; clothes do show off, and no mistake!"

It was cut too low, and I told them so, but nobody would hear to a word against the dress, and Mrs. Margrette appeared perfectly carried away, and told me very sharply "she guessed Worth knew his business!"

They wanted three hundred and fifty dollars for it, but Mrs. Margrette got them to come down; as there wasn't a single thing to do but to freshen up the tulle, I took it, and didn't have it charged to Senator Bellars, either!

The Roxburgs' house was perfectly superb, but I didn't take in anything then—I was too excited. When the cab stopped at the awning I got out and crawled along the red carpet and up the steps like a fly on the ceiling; my dress was heavy and I was as cold as ice in it. Inside the house my feet sank down in the thick carpets, and the air was heavy with perfume and flowers. Several ladies went up the steps with me, and the rustle of their dresses and the heavy perfumes played over my nerves. When a butler took the old coat I wore (I hadn't dreamed of an evening-wrap) and my head veil, I felt as naked as a new-born child, and not much more able to speak. My dress was so long I almost fell in it, and my shoes and gloves hurt, but I knew that my gown was perfectly beautiful, long and silky and shining and soft, and it comforted me.

It was a relief to me to see that Mrs. Roxburg was even more undressed than I *felt*. She was a big woman, with a proud, rude look, and her eyes and her jewels seemed to glitter at me. When I shook hands with her I had to tell her twice who I was. Then she said: "Really? Howdy do—delighted!" And over her shoulder to my husband, who was standing there with several men—

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

he'd been kept so long he had to dress there—she announced:

“Your wife, Mr. Kirkland.”

He looked pleased, but he was evidently angry at something or other. In seeing him my first feeling used to be, I wonder if he's himself! But I knew I didn't need to wonder that any more; it would have been more reasonable if I had thought, “I wonder what he has changed to now?”

He had a flower in his buttonhole, and Mrs. Roxburg was wearing the same kind. My husband stared at me as though I were a perfect stranger; indeed, I must have looked like a perfect stranger to him—I never saw a man more surprised. Then he burst out laughing very softly, and bent down and said to me so low that no one else heard:

“By *Jove*, Cinderella, who is your fairy godmother?”

“It's a real Worth gown,” I told him. “Is it all right?”

He smiled broadly and seemed pleased with me, and I could see that he thought I was joking when I said “Worth.”

Mrs. Roxburg came up and brought a gentleman to take me in to dinner. There were forty people at the table, and I could watch and think of Senator Bellars's remark about the “feeding of the hog.”

Mrs. Roxburg went in with a dark, foreign-looking man—the Prince Ribisco—and she hung on his arm, laughing up at him, her jewels flashing. My husband was near her, a good way down the table. Mrs. Roxburg flirted dreadfully with the foreigner, and Senator Roxburg paid no attention to it whatever. He was talking with the lady on his left, and my husband was the only person the flirtation seemed to annoy. The gentlemen on either side of me talked, and it wasn't hard to answer, for they were interesting, and managed so that the first thing I knew they both talked together across

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

me about the questions at issue. By-and-by I heard Mr. Kirkland answer down the table something Senator Roxburg said, and this set my husband going, and for quite a while he talked, and the whole dinner-party listened to him. Mrs. Roxburg stopped flirting with the Prince, and silenced him when he tried to interrupt. I was glad. When my husband stopped speaking the guest on my right said:

"Senator Roxburg has a most unusual secretary. You must be proud of your husband, Mrs. Kirkland."

The gentlemen stayed in the dining-room to smoke, but the Prince came out with Mrs. Roxburg, and they whispered and flirted all the evening. I wouldn't have minded sitting there and watching if my shoes hadn't hurt, and my dress hadn't been so awfully tight; but it was glistening and pretty, and it fell softly, and I liked to think of it being mine, and to look down at it.

In the carriage my husband said to me:

"You were the best-dressed woman in the room. Mrs. Roxburg looked a mammoth alongside of you. I am much obliged, Esther. I was proud of you, my dear—"

Of course, I was perfectly delighted.

"—I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw you enter that room! I didn't care what you wore—if you had come in a waterproof it would have been all one to me; nevertheless, I *am* much obliged. I didn't know Washington could turn out such a creation as your dress!"

Then I told him again it was Worth. He lit a cigarette and threw the match out of the window and laughed.

"Well, upon my word! And I told Senator Roxburg, who admired it very much, that *my wife made it herself!*"

"Goodness gracious!" I exclaimed. "You *must* think I can work miracles!"

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

And he turned on me very solemnly and said, "I do think so."

When we got to our rooms he asked me, "What do you think of Roxburg?"

And I answered that the Senator seemed to depend upon his secretary very much indeed.

Mr. Kirkland didn't notice this, and after a little while asked, "What do you think of his wife?"

"I think she is stylish and handsome."

"She's a stupid coquette," my husband exclaimed, angrily. "Roxburg is as blind as a bat."

He didn't say any more on that subject; and when I told him there wasn't a man in the room as clever as he was, he listened. I went on to say how splendid his speech was at the table, and how everybody had enjoyed hearing him talk. He was washing his hands at the basin and wiping each finger slowly. He said to me:

"This life down here in Washington is what I want, but I don't want it in this way. I have a great mind to go out West and practise law in some small town and make my name there." He looked at me eagerly. "What do you think of that, Esther?"

"I think it is a splendid idea."

"So do I, so do I, my dear girl. Westward ho!"

He drew a long breath, stretched his arms, and exclaimed, "The plains, the eternal waste, the primeval sweeps, the new soil, the simple people, and the miles of unploughed land!"

He came over to me and sat down by me on the bed. I had not begun to undress. I thought I would wait until he finished talking, and then I would go into my own room.

"Patient Griselda, how much longer is this divine pa-

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

tience going to last?" And he interrupted himself. "Don't answer me—don't set a limit." He took my hand up and looked at it hard, and said, softly: "You have manicured your nails, too—upon my word! I remember I used to watch those fingers fly over the typing-keys—do you ever miss your work, Esther?"

I told him that I hadn't had much time, and that possibly I could work some out West.

He exclaimed: "Never—never—except for me! When you came into the Roxburgs' drawing-room to-night I couldn't believe my eyes. Of course, you don't know how you looked—you are so utterly unconscious of yourself. But you made every woman in the room tawdry and poor. I don't pretend to say what *it is*, my dear girl, but you've got it! Or, rather," he said, more softly still, "*I've got it, and it belongs to me!*"

He put his arms around me then and said, "Look at me, my dear girl," and the expression I had seen the day of the "umbrella" down in Nassau Street was on his face, only this time it remained and did not fade; and he whispered, "Call me by my name."

And I waited until I had opened up every door in my mind that was shut against him, and I said, "Stephen."

And he kissed me as he had never done before—never; and I thought of all he had fought for and fought over, and how hard things had been for him, and how he really hadn't anything or anybody to stand by him but me—just me, to begin with—to go West with. And I felt sorry for him, and something broke that had been hard against him *always*—and I put my arms around him, and he laid his head down on my breast.

CHAPTER XXXIX



THE end of that week we were on the cars going north. He had just thrown up his position with Senator Roxburg like a flash. But he had agreed to transact some important business in New York, and so we went there to start west.

My husband drew pictures of the West, of the "vast plains," and said that he had always wanted to go West, and that now he was "being carried on by the chariots of Fate."

"Do you know, Esther, I was inspired very much by a speech my uncle made in the Senate last week? He was speaking of the need the mass felt of regeneration—of the need for fresh spirits from a fresher plane. There is 'intoxication' in the West—in the Occident," and he smiled as he used that word. "I don't mean to frighten you with that term—the word *intoxication*, my dear girl—but the wheat-fields have several ways of stimulating a man—his brain, his mind, and his body. Don't forget that they *give us bread*."

Though we had been in Washington only six months, it was a lifetime for us, and we brought away a new career for Stephen, a lot of experience for me, and a Worth gown that cost three hundred dollars. I could give that to Fanny—I didn't believe I would need it in the wheat-fields Stephen

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

was dreaming about. At Trenton, my husband got a telegram from Senator Roxburg, saying the man he was to see in New York was very ill, and we decided we'd go right out by the next western train.

When we arrived at Jersey City it was five o'clock. All around was a rush of people for the suburban trains. We wandered side by side toward the gates with the crowd; we were the last to go through, and at our side was the big flyer for Chicago, with the little dining-tables set and the waiters in their white coats. A gateman called out:

"Buffalo!—Rochester!—Cleveland!—all points West!" and on the other side a man sang out:

"Brackettsville first stop."

It was the express the office people took out home, and I knew it pretty well—I had taken it night after night for ten years. I knew the conductors and the gatemen and the candy boys and the newspaper boys, and the old station with the restaurant and the flies and the fruit and the smell of everything, and the ferry-boats coming in "bump" against the piers.

"Shall I go and see about the baggage," I asked Stephen, "while you get the tickets?"

He was standing in the door of the waiting-room, smiling in his old, dreamy way.

"Isn't that the boys' train, Esther?"

"I guess so; they usually take the five-eight."

"Buffalo!—Rochester!—Cleveland; and all points West!—forward on the right."

And to me Stephen said out in a voice like the man's:

"Europe, Asia, and Africa *on the left*—why not? What *is* in a place, after all, my dear girl?"

"Why, I thought you never wanted to go to Europe again!"

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

For, honestly, I wouldn't have been surprised if he had started going down and taking a ship for China. Nothing surprised me in those days. I felt keyed up all the time—we were making our way—we were making our way, and now I can look back and see, as it were, sparks fly out behind our train.

I was excited. My husband said:

"I never said I didn't want to see *Brackettsville* again, did I, Esther? Let's go out home."

He put his hand on my arm and turned me toward the other side of the station, where the lines of commuters were walking along with their newspaper bundles—an ordinary, quiet procession of which I had been part for years of my life.

"Come," Stephen said, "never mind the baggage. We can give our checks up to Moore at the Brackettsville station. He'll send for them." And as he helped me up the steps of the old train he laughed. "Your Worth gown isn't in any hurry to get to Brackettsville, is it? *We are!*"

He bought a lot of papers from the boy and some marshmallows for me. He was as gay as a child, and took off his hat to some people who were coming back from a *matinée* in New York.

"Keep a watch out of your window for the boys, Esther," he said. "They will be utterly surprised to see us, won't they?"

I was beyond speech. Here we were making back to Brackettsville, which I had left in a kind of family disgrace when I was married. No West—no fields at all—just the old place. The itinerary of the tour was changed, sure enough, but somehow or other the fire in me hadn't all died down yet. Stephen took hold of my hand and said:

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"One twig is as good as another to start from if you are going to fly, and, anyway, I want to see the old place."

I remembered what his uncle had said about starting, and I was glad, anyway, that I wasn't taking back to Brackettsville the same man I had taken away.

The boys came along about then. They had grown awfully. Pete was nearly six feet tall. I couldn't believe my eyes.

We took a little scrap of a house, with a garden, by the year. The boys and Fanny came and boarded with us, and Stephen said we were "founding a family." Right away he went to New York and took a small, insignificant position in a lawyer's firm. I never had known that he had been through the Harvard Law School and admitted to the bar before he went abroad.

Of course, he was as good at that as at everything else. A real genius. I knew that office would be too narrow for him, and that after a while he would shake it off like a shell. Even in the first year the Brackettsville people began to talk about him and of how first-rate he was at the law, and now that he didn't drink a drop he could work harder and longer than any man I ever saw. That spring I used to wish that we had a child. It seemed as though things were settling down, and I would have loved it. But it wasn't to be.

Fanny came back from Europe prettier than ever, very stylish, with lots of airs and ideas, and her old employer made her his private secretary at a salary of a hundred dollars a month; and the boys were doing very well indeed.

I saw right away that things were going to be as they were before between Stephen and Fanny; only I was wrong—they were far worse.

Stephen brought me up some typewriting to do for him.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

This kept me very busy. He began to get enthusiastic about his cases, and he said that "the law was a lamp that lit up the universe for a man of his temperament."

He was in the office of Judge Rollins, the referee, and he made about five thousand a year then.

I saw, before long, that the older of our boys—Pete—was worrying about something. He was a real Carey, and I knew how they were and that he would never tell. Pete was very reserved and not very strong, and I didn't know what to do. One night I came in late from a church social and saw his window open and that he was sitting up in it. All the others were in bed. I went into Pete's room and got him to tell me. He had been playing cards, and drinking a little, too, I guess. I told him not to bother about the money—that didn't matter—and we would talk it over together some other time, and he seemed made over new when he had that weight lifted off his mind. Then I thought out my plan alone. I went down to New York to see a man I used to work for when I had my own office, and when I came out to Brackettsville I had a long talk with Pete, and told him some of my experiences. That same week he gave up his position in New York, and I took him down to the wharf and saw him off on the *St. Mary's* for a long, long cruise; and when he bade me good-bye he said:

"Sis, you have struck it just right. This is my vocation, and you have taken me just in time."

It was a comfort to me to know that Pete was satisfied. I never said a word about it to my husband, but Fanny and I had seen Pete off together.

When Stephen came home with a big box of fire-crackers on the Fourth of July, to set them off in our front yard with the boys, he asked, "Where's Pete?"

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

He hadn't missed him before, and when I told him he stared at me.

"You got your brother on a war-ship without any training or education?" he said to me; and then I told him that Pete was nothing but a stenographer and typewriter for the officers.

"Without a word of advice from me you have changed a man's life in a fortnight."

I told my husband that Pete had been "changing his life" faster than that, without any advice from the family.

My husband was entirely absorbed in his sister-in-law, and I knew that they corresponded outside of the house.

She was the prettiest girl of her age that you could wish to see. She had brown hair, with a curly kink in it, and it always seemed *fixed*, no matter what! Her eyes were dark blue, almost too big, for they looked fast, and she said herself they embarrassed her. She had a lovely skin, a real Carey skin, shell-like—the kind that on the hottest day always is cool as ivory. She would have passed for a real beauty anywhere, and Europe had spoiled her.

I had noticed that Mr. Kirkland was beginning to write again on his law reports, for the work that he gave me was all scrawled over the back with things like

"Oh, lovely, laughing Irish eyes,
Amethystine eyes—azure orbs."

Fanny's eyes were all those things.

Stephen spent a great deal of money on her. It made me sick to think she would take it from him, but she was really carried away by Stephen—that was all there was

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

about it. We had so much candy in the house that every one overate, and we sent the last box out to Pete, in Honolulu. He wrote me real nice letters for a boy, and said he was crazy about the sea.

After my first jealous anger was over I began to think chiefly about Fanny's part in this.

One night my husband came in late from New York at dinner-time, and said:

"Well, I've got the tickets and the sleepers for to-morrow night."

"Why, what tickets, Stephen?" I asked. And he looked at me perfectly surprised, and said:

"Why, the tickets for Yellowstone Park, of course."

"Who's going?"

And he laughed out loud. "You and Fanny and myself, of course! What's the matter, Esther? Have you lost your mind?"

I helped the soup, and I could see that even Fanny was surprised that I didn't know. We never said anything to each other but monosyllables these days, and didn't mention plans or any subjects between us. I didn't mean that any one should see my feelings now.

"Who will look after you, Ferdie?" I asked my other brother, and he said he was going to take his vacation the next week. Then Stephen began to talk about the trip, and the striped sands of Yellowstone Park and the vast plains, and how we would ride.

"Pearl"—he called Fanny that—"will be exquisite on a donkey, won't she? I have half contrived this trip for the pleasure of seeing her ride one of those gentle beasts."

"I hope they'll be that kind," I said.

My sister was fearfully embarrassed. I could see that she

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

was annoyed at Stephen and annoyed with me, and probably with herself as well; but he was in great spirits. He laughed and joked and drank his sizzling ginger-ale and made toasts to his sister-in-law, Pearl—or Eulaine, as he sometimes called Fanny now.

In the hall outside there was a big express-box which Stephen had brought up with him on the hack. It contained three new linen suits for him, shirts and stockings and lots of fine underclothes. A Panama hat came for him early the next morning, and a box of lovely thin handkerchiefs marked "Pearl." I put them in Fanny's room and got ready.

Every now and then a bitter taste came up in my mouth as though there was gall on my very lips, and I said to myself, "I won't go a step with them!" But I knew that my husband wouldn't budge if I didn't, and he needed the vacation terribly. It was perfectly killing the way he took me for granted, just as people take the earth or the sky.

CHAPTER XL



I was a queer trip.

I might as well have gone alone. But it gave me a chance to see the country and the West. My husband seemed on his honeymoon with Fanny, and I used to get perfectly wild—*wild for her!* She was really in love with him in a way, but he never so much as referred to Fanny in any way. As soon as the doors of our room were shut he appeared to forget her, and all his interests were centred in the legal affairs he had left behind. He was receiving letters from Judge Rollins, and from Senator Roxburg, and while we were in Denver some one wired him to ask him to take a case which he told me, if he accepted, would bring him fifteen thousand dollars.

I was watching Fanny like a hare, and stuck on everywhere they went. My husband didn't know or care, but Fanny was blue and sullen when I was around. He teased her and joked her and made love to her under my very eyes. And I couldn't but feel that he would just as soon kiss her before me, for he was as unconscious of my presence as one is of the earth and the air; but, like the earth and air, I kept there!—under his feet . . . ? Well, I didn't feel it so! Most of the time I had a solemn, frightened feeling: it was growing serious as far as my sister was concerned.

Neither one of them could shake me, and when I saw that

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

the only person I made mad by staying around was Fanny, I pitied her. Nobody could be as pretty as Fanny and be safe with a man, and when I was taken with one of my violent headaches on the day of one of our excursions at Colorado Springs, I felt that Fate had overtaken her.

Fanny couldn't disguise her feelings. She was delighted that I was laid up, and before they started she came in to see how I was.

"Fanny," I said, "in my top drawer is a little packet. Will you hand it to me?"

She did as I asked; and then I gave it to her.

"There," I said; "the girl found them out in the front yard—you must have dropped them. I haven't had a chance to give them to you before. I don't need to tell you that I have not read them, but I'd burn them if I were you."

She snatched them from me—half a dozen letters from my husband to her, addressed to Fanny at the post-office in Brackettsville, "to be called for." She was flaming red when she went out of the room—without making a remark.

They started away on their all-day trip, and I was nearly out of my mind about it. I couldn't speak to my husband—I knew that he would have flown into a passion and have denied that he cared whether Fanny lived or died, and that, ten to one, after a scene with me, he might have taken something to drink.

Fanny had on a blue serge skirt that day, a blue shirt-waist, and a sailor with a blue ribbon around it. She looked eighteen years old, no more, and her skin gleamed like pearl. It was not until they had been gone several hours that, like a flash, Miss Pagee came over my dull, heavy mind—came like a mist—like a ghost from another world. I could see the picture of her boat and her floating veil. I hadn't

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

thought of her for a long time, and now I remembered how I had kissed her like a sister; and I decided that I had been mean and cruel to my own sister, and very weak altogether.

At three o'clock in the afternoon I dressed, sick as I felt, put on my hat, and then a faintness seized me, and, as it had often done before, there came the certainty that I was unequal to my task, and couldn't stem the tide of life that went so fast around me. By the time I got down-stairs I was dripping wet with perspiration, but started out to walk down the road which I knew they would be likely to take coming back, and it was as if Millie Pagee went along by my side, white and breezy, and after I had taken some dozen steps in the road I stood still where I was and prayed.

Then I returned to the hotel, and sat down on the piazza and waited.

About supper-time they drove up in a hotel carriage, both of them sitting back and not speaking to each other.

When they drove up Fanny said she was tired and hot, and she looked cross as anything and went up-stairs. But Stephen was as bright and as gay as a bird. He said:

"I have been impressed, absorbed, intensely absorbed, by the beauty of this country. The clarity of the atmosphere—this air like wine. Still, I don't feel that it is my natural element. Can't we get out, Esther? I want to leave Colorado."

He took his hat off, and told me about the ranches they had visited. He asked me if my head was better, and said he was sorry I hadn't been along. Here one of the clerks came out and gave him a despatch, and he went in, and I was certain by the way he had acted that we had passed a crisis right here in Colorado Springs, and I would have given a five-dollar bill to have seen how Fanny and my husband

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

had spent that day together, especially after his talk to me up in our rooms that night.

I wrote out some letters for him for his office that evening, and it was late before we sent them down-stairs.

"Esther," he exclaimed, "my dear girl, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I am bored—*bored to extinction by your sister!* I am sorry to be rude, my dear, but another afternoon like this would give me softening of the brain!"

Then he smiled at me with his greatest charm, and suggested, like a little boy who is asking a favor:

"Couldn't you arrange to send Fanny home? *Couldn't* you, my dear girl? It's like going to market to go out with her for eight hours on a stretch, and I feel as though I had carried all the vegetables home!"

And still smiling at me, he waited, eagerly, for me to help him out.

"Let's all go back to Brackettsville to-morrow, Stephen."

"No, no, I'm out to explore, and I'm not going to turn pale at the first variation of the chart. I have interests in Oretown, Nevada, for Judge Rollins, and you and I will go on to-morrow and send Fanny back."

But I told him that we couldn't do anything of that kind, that she was with us as our guest, that she was going to stay with us right along, and that when he had finished his business in Nevada we would go back together.

He gave up rather humbly, and said: "All right, my dear, only remember that I married you and not your family."

And I told him that we were narrowing down fast.

"Well, don't get any more headaches on our all-day excursions."

Fanny had eaten her supper up in her own room, and I went in to see how she was getting on. She was reading a

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

novel in bed. She looked tired out, and as though she had been crying. As soon as I came in, she said:

"See here, Esther, I'm sick of this trip. Europe's a great deal prettier and more cultivated. Anyhow, I don't believe Mr. Foster (he was her employer) is ever going to get on with my substitute."

"Didn't you like the ranches?" I asked her.

"Goodness! It's *awfully* tame after Europe! I am ready to go home."

I told her we were going on to Oretown the next day, and I couldn't let her break up the party like this here. And when I bade her good-night, I said:

"If you want to go back from Oretown on Sunday night I guess we can fix it up, only your ticket is good as far as San Francisco."

"Mercy!" she exclaimed, as cross as anything. "I don't see how any one can travel West who can go to Europe. But you haven't been abroad, Esther. Do you like it here?"

And I told her I thought it was a good enough place to start away from, but that *I* hadn't seen the ranches!

CHAPTER XLI



THINGS that start away and round out into the wide, wide circles, start from the littlest specks. As I look back now, Oretown, Nevada, seems a speck to begin from, and yet Stephen's life started there. Our train was fourteen hours late. As we got off the filthy cars we saw a bare, hot road, and, half a mile back, a settlement of houses which was Oretown, some fifteen miles from Gold City. How dreadfully homeless the plains can be in the winter I learned to know. The grass had been cut, and the stubble was rough and ugly. There was a group at the station, for the town had turned out to meet Stephen, and an old hack, white with dust, with skittish horses acting like sixty, waited to drive us over. The men were awfully Western in their looks and dress, but they were very polite to Fanny and me. They were representative men, interested in this new town, the starting-point of the O. & W. N. Railroad.

My husband had come from New York to attend to the contracts. He was attending as well to the financiering of the railroad.

Just before we came to our destination the best-looking man of the party, Judge Baxfield, said:

"I had planned to receive you at my house, ladies, but I did not know that there were three of you in your party. I have only one spare room."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

My husband said:

"If you are really so kind, Judge, as to want any of us, take the ladies. I can put up at the—" And he asked the name, with his eyebrows, of Mr. Madder, the editor of the *Oretown News*.

"First Hotel," Madder answered, "and it might be called the first and the only, because it is both."

I could see that Fanny thought the Judge good-looking. He looked clean, cheerful, and smart. He had white teeth, like new corn, and a pointed beard just turning a little bit gray. He laughed a great deal, and his voice was pleasant and Southern. I should say he was about forty years old.

"You don't know how proud I am, ladies! Such a pleasure as this hasn't been mine since I came to Oretown."

He didn't seem a bit embarrassed.

"It is not New York, but it is all yours from now on, and the guest-room is at the head of the stairs."

There was a colored boy at the door, with a white apron on and a face as black as ink.

Our room was big and cool. The furniture was "old Virginia Colonial," Judge Baxfield told us; when he had come to Nevada to live here he had brought his goods with him.

The other rooms upstairs were not furnished at all. That was how it happened there was only one guest-room. I learned afterward that his wife died the first year they were out here.

We stood, Fanny and I, out West—far out West—and together in the same room, as far as I could remember, for the first time in our lives.

It was nearly eight o'clock, and the sun was sinking down, and our windows fronted the west. Outside the horizon

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

was a long, fiery band, and the light floated in and laid its crimson touch over everything.

"Well, upon my word, Esther Carey," Fanny said, "if this isn't the dreariest jumping-off place on the globe! And how can we ever sleep together? *I'm* not used to it."

"Well," I said, "I guess you won't find me much bother, Fanny. I have learned to squeeze up on the edge of the bed, and not mind it if all the bedclothes and the pillows are taken away."

She laughed. "Goodness!" she exclaimed. "How *queer* you are!"

I began to fix the bags and to sort out the things for Stephen, and it seemed strange to have our things apart and to send him over his. I hadn't any doubt that he would put them on all wrong, for if I hadn't given him out what I thought it was right for him to wear, he would put on one gray stocking and one black, and never know the difference.

"Judge Baxfield is nice-looking, isn't he, Fanny?"

"H'm! he hasn't much style. They all look like hay-seeds!"

And I told her I guessed it was a good crop. Senator Bellars was from Nevada, and the State had charm for me, but I could see my sister thought I was limited because I hadn't travelled abroad. After all, Fanny had only been once, and I've found out that it is only when you have been over several times that you learn to be quiet about it.

CHAPTER XLII



AFTER the first day or two I discovered Oretown was a man's town. There were men everywhere, and Fanny flirted frightfully. My husband stayed on at the First Hotel, for people came from all over the district to see him about the railroad, and there the two Senators, Mr. Rose and Mr. Hendricks, acting through Stephen, organized and put through the road known then as the Oretown & West Nevada, and to-day as "the Big N."

Stephen could have his company more freely at First Hotel. I did the secretary work, but in the afternoon he wouldn't hear of my writing, so Judge Baxfield would take me in his surrey out to drive over the soft, reddish roads, to "prospect," as he said. He rode a great deal on horseback, and in his riding-clothes looked like a handsome officer of the Confederate Army. Fanny—you couldn't lay your finger on her! She was off from morning till night with her friends, and if she had been the only woman in Oretown they couldn't have been crazier about her! It amused Stephen very much when he had time to think about it.

"I'm glad your sister is such a success, Esther. It's worth while taking a pretty girl around. She'd be invaluable in a campaign as a vote-solicitor, wouldn't she?—or as a lobbyist."

One day, when we had been working hard over prospec-

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

tuses and old grants and new land purchases, Stephen put down on the table a tiny box done up in paper and seals.

"Here's a souvenir for you, my dear girl. Open the first tribute from the O. & W. N. to its private secretary."

It was exciting to unseal and unwrap, and when I found a ruby ring for the little finger, set round with diamonds, a perfect beauty, I was simply delighted! It was the only present he had given me except my wedding-ring. Until I put that ring on my finger I didn't know I had missed presents.

I laid my hand on Stephen's shoulder and watched my ring sparkle, and thanked him—and he called me a name he often used afterward—"Best in the World."

"Standing by, my dear girl, always standing by, like a signal at a crossing—like a buoy out at the whirlpool's edge—like a torch at the danger of the mine—like a lighthouse star over the reef."

"Nonsense, Stephen," I said; "you're too poetical for a lawyer. You ought to write an Iliad, that's what *you* ought to do!"

He was lawyer as well as financier, and out here on this deal, as soon as they had looked over the contract and drawn up the sales and deeds of the district, and done the land-purchase part, Stephen's chiefs intended to come out to Oretown. It was much to my husband's honor that no one had to come. Without a bit of fuss and hitch the deal went through, and his reports and his legal work were so *AI* that they gave Stephen *carte blanche* to wind up the business, and sent the surveyors for the road out to him to take their directions. It was from his first check, on the day they broke the first ground across the plains toward Carson City, the

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

dreary, I suppose, by most people; Fanny thought so. Next week they were going to cut the line through, and I looked forward to watching it grow from my window.

"If Judge Baxfield asked me to marry him, I'd do it quicker than a wink," my sister said.

And I answered: "If you really feel that way, Fanny, if I were you I'd go home right now."

"Goodness gracious! What for?"

"Because you've carried on so here and flirted, and, now you're tired, it will look as if you threw yourself at Judge Baxfield's head. Go back to Brackettsville, and let him miss you."

When we had blown the candles out and gone to bed, Fanny agreed, for a wonder. "I believe you're right, Esther. I'm really set on this, and serious. I'll take your advice, and go back home this week." After a little she went on: "But suppose the Judge never comes and never asks me?"

"Why, then you can come out here again. It's more than likely we shall be here right along for a year or so, anyhow."

CHAPTER XLIII



ANNY went East. It was the only time she took counsel from anybody in the world, I really believe, and she hadn't been gone more than a week when I wondered what on earth had made me send her and what she would say if she could see what was going on right here in Oretown.

I don't honestly think it was my fault.

Judge Baxfield didn't suggest that Stephen should come over from the hotel when he found that Fanny was going away. Stephen was better off at the hotel, and it would have made me nervous to have him muss up Judge Baxfield's neat, spick-and-span rooms. I went over to the hotel, and they put me up in an awful room, and my lovely west view had disappeared. We went to meals at Judge Baxfield's regularly. My husband said he was an ideal man. For my part, I don't think there are any ideal men going round on two feet. There may be some yet to be born, or some dead: *I never saw any, not my ideal, anyhow!* The very things they're short on *make you like them just for those reasons.* Since Mr. Sinclair's death I had never seen Stephen take a fancy to any one. When he told about his schemes and his work with the O. & W. N., Judge Baxfield listened, for the most part, without saying a word. It was plain as the nose on your face that he didn't like my husband. Whenever

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

there was a dig to give or a little sharp thing to say, he didn't lose the chance, and Stephen didn't appear to notice or to mind.

Judge Baxfield took me out riding in his buckboard to see the men laying rails, and over back to the farms in the other direction, and before I knew it we had pretty much ridden through the district. He seemed to love the State, and told me that he hadn't quite made up his mind whether or not to run for the Senate at the next election. Mr. Bellars was the other representative for Nevada. Judge Baxfield never spoke to me of my husband. In the afternoons, when I had nothing to do, we used to go down to the orchard back of his house, where he had built an arbor, and he read aloud to me, his straw hat on the bench by his side, and I would work on some centrepieces I had ordered sent out to me. I was always thinking now of a real home.

I tried once to talk to Judge Baxfield about his wife who had died, but he liked better to tell about Virginia, and when he found out that my family were from Georgia it seemed to be a real bond. My husband's words constantly returned to my mind, and I tried to think of Fanny and Judge Baxfield together.

It was nearly apple-time, and the apples hung red in the trees. The air was perfectly delicious, like wine, and gently blowy. From where we sat we could hear the creek running down to the grain-fields. My husband had closed up the first part of the railroad work, and there was no reason why we should stay on an hour here, and I expected him any minute to tell me to pack up; but lately he had taken to riding over to Carson City and through the district, showing an interest in the country in general. He was one of the people you wouldn't prophesy about, and as I sewed and

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

listened to Judge Baxfield read *Middlemarch* I was thinking I wouldn't be surprised if Stephen stayed out here, for some reason or other, and that I should like it as well as anything.

Judge Baxfield said: "Either Mr. Kirkland or I will have to go East." He put *Middlemarch* down by his hat on the bench, folded his hands on the back of the seat, and leaned forward, looking at me with all his might. There was so much in his face, he looked so earnestly and sadly, that I got right up and let my work fall. To go out of the arbor I should have to pass him, and it frightened me.

"Ever since I came here from Virginia I have been trying to endure the loss of my wife, whom I loved. I was a young man then; it will be harder now. Don't speak—don't speak. I know what you would say. I know, I know" . . .

I didn't answer him, for I didn't know what to say. How could I preach? I hadn't been very good about caring for married people myself. The creek dashed by loud and clear, and up in the red apple-tree, where I looked to escape his eyes, there were shafts of bright sunlight, like fairy swords. The Judge had asked us over to supper this evening, as usual, and I thought to myself: "Dear me, we *can't* stay now!"

"... Ever since the day you got off the train at the Junction and drove over, sitting opposite me in the stage, then came to my house and under my roof, and lived here like a dove with your sister—ever since I've loved you, Esther Kirkland. You are not so spoiled that it will do you any harm to hear this."

"Yes, it will"—I spoke then. "Please don't tell me any more."

He answered, quietly: "I will not tell you any more. I will never speak again, and that's a great deal to promise

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

a woman. I have read of good women, of strong and tender women, and women who were sacrificed to men's egotism—"

"Please, Judge Baxfield—"

"I have read of the patient Griseldas and thought them ridiculous. *You* are the ideal woman." He said this several times, and then rose. "*The ideal woman.*"

I felt perfectly ashamed, for I had just been thinking to myself there were no ideal men. It was so utterly foolish and so impossible that he should care for me that I wasn't able to take it as deeply as he meant me to and as I should.

"I won't say anything about your husband, or, rather, about the man you've married," he went on. "But if there's anything ever you want done—at any time and anywhere—any service on God's earth, let me know it, Esther Kirkland. Let me render it." He put out both his hands. "I pray of you, let me be the one to serve you."

He stood like that, his hands outstretched, and it all flashed over me, and I said:

"There *is* something that you could do that I would like you to do, only you wouldn't hear of it—"

When he laughed it made my heart ache; the sound had a kind of expectant pleasure in it.

"*Wouldn't* do it! Why, I'd *live* to do it day and night. What is it?"

"I don't suppose you'll do it right now, anyway." I spoke fast—it wasn't easy, with him staring down like that at me. "I don't expect you to more than think it over now. I'd be glad if you'd marry my sister Fanny."

He stepped back, half fell down on the bench, and burst into an awful laugh.

"I beg your pardon," he said, after a second; then went on, violently: "I think you must be crazy! Marry your

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

sister! Why, I love *you*, I love *you*! Starved and neglected woman, don't you know what the word *love* means?"

This I didn't answer; it was none of his business.

"There are some men," he exclaimed, angrily, "who draw good women by their very vices; their weakness has a charm for certain devoted feminine souls—"

"My sister Fanny would make you a good wife and make you very happy," I said, right on top of this. "I ought not to tell you, but I will: I really think she likes you very much."

I believe he swore, and clinched the seat between his hands, but I had to stand stock-still, not daring to pass him. After a second, he said, "You are free to leave this arbor, Mrs. Kirkland, when you will," and he stepped aside and I flew out. I didn't think anything I had said about Fanny would make a bit of difference to him *then*, but I thought he might think of it later; anyhow, he would remember what I said about her liking him, and perhaps it would touch him when he thought about me.

I hadn't gone as far as the front porch when I met Stephen coming along, gay as a boy, his papers under his arm. I wanted to tell him that I had a headache and couldn't go in to supper, but before I could speak he drew my arm through his and hurried me up the porch steps, telling me about his visit to Carson City, where he had been two days.

We stayed to supper, and Stephen talked all the time. He said a lot about the "pæans of the Occident," "the hymns to the Virgin Land," and how glad he was he had drifted West, and of how the country had need of every thinking man to speak for her.

"Oretown is my branch at last," he said; "I shall poise here until I am ready to fly."

And Judge Baxfield answered, quietly: "I don't think

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

First Hotel is much of a perch for Mrs. Kirkland to poise on."

And Stephen laughed. "Esther doesn't mind, my dear Baxfield; she is not a materialist; she's *above* the branch, aren't you, my dear girl? But, curiously enough, that's just what I want to talk to you about, Baxfield."

It was terrible to me to see the Judge's face, and to realize how nervous Stephen made him.

"Do you want to talk to me about Mrs. Kirkland's spirituality?" the Judge asked.

"No. About settling down here, in Oretown, Baxfield. I've decided to practise law in this county. I've bought the Oretown *Cry*, and I'm going to make it echo over the eternal plains, and I'm going to do some of their law work for them here if they'll give it to me, and so on, and so on—"

And Judge Baxfield took it up. "And so on," he continued, slowly, "*to the East again?*"

My husband leaned back in his chair smoking his long cigarette and smiling like a boy, just as though he wasn't talking to a man who was absorbed in his own career and close political ambitions right here in this district. "So on to the East again." He nodded genially to Judge Baxfield.

"*To the House of Representatives?*"

Stephen smoked and smiled.

"*To the Senate, Kirkland?*"

Stephen didn't say a word. Judge Baxfield laughed softly and drank off his glass of water, wiped his mouth, and put his napkin down; then he looked at me quite a long time while my husband gazed after his tobacco smoke, and at his ideas and how high they went. A million times, in the look he gave me, Judge Baxfield repeated what he had said to me out in the orchard, and I blushed, for his expression was

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

wonderful: exalted, noble, and beautiful—triumphant. He made me meet his eyes, and they told me: “There, *now you know*, and you’ll *have* to accept what I’m going to do!” Then he looked over at Stephen, and the light died from his face.

“You want to speak to me, Kirkland, about settling in Oretown in view of your new career?”

“Yes; the First Hotel may be all very well as a penance, but it’s played out.”

“Quite so,” the Judge agreed. “Why don’t you take my house?”

My husband put his chair down on its four legs and took his cigarette in his hand.

“I’m going East this week,” our friend continued. “I’ve had news that calls me out of Oretown indefinitely. I’m thinking of going to Washington: in all likelihood, I shall never turn up here again.”

“But, my dear Baxfield—”

“The place will be a white elephant on my hands, as you can see for yourself, Kirkland—a useless extravagance and expense. It has served its purpose, and, as you say of First Hotel, it has worn itself out. It would be a real favor to me if you would take it off my hands.”

“By *Jove*!” Stephen exclaimed, “one of the reasons for my hanging on out here is you: we hit it off so well together.”

Judge Baxfield’s colored boy had brought in the black coffee, and the Judge poured out the three cups and handed me mine.

“I shall be sorry to go in some respects, glad in others; at any rate, it’s a settled thing. Think over what I say about the house.”

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"But your public field here, old man?"

And the Judge answered, shortly: "The facts are just as I have stated them, Kirkland."

Stephen accepted. "Thank you, Baxfield, I will be glad to take the house."

He never asked me or turned to me. I sat stirring my coffee. I felt that we were nothing but robbers of this man's goods, and I found my courage, and said to Stephen:

"Why, any house is good enough for us while we stay on here."

Judge Baxfield broke in: "*There* you are wrong! The house is rough enough and simple enough, God knows. The life is dull enough, but it will be more like home than anything in Oretown, and I reckon a woman likes that." He was looking at me steadily. "I shall be honored if you will move in here, Mrs. Kirkland, and make a home of the place, and watch the O. & W. N. grow from your window, and watch your husband's career from here."

I could have cried. I was angry and touched. I knew that the Judge adored his house and the garden, and that he had a triumphant feeling in his heart. I knew, without any words, that he felt he was giving me my first home, the one he had built and made, and he was right: it was the first real home I ever had.

We were to move in on a Wednesday and to take the keys from the Judge himself, and Stephen and he transacted the deal together; but when we came to take possession we found he had gone on East the night before, and we went in alone, my husband and myself, and Stephen was perfectly delighted.

That first evening in the west room Stephen and I stood there together looking out. There were frame huts thrown

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

up now, here and there, on the plains, on the line of the railroad; and many miles away, in the clear atmosphere, we could see the smoke of the first cabins of the Dagos. The Italians and Poles came in car-loads and broke through the road with Oretown overseers, and the earth cut up like magic; one day there was only a big, husky bunch of men under my window, and it seemed the very next a car rolled by.

"It's fine, isn't it?" Stephen said—"big and inspiring, and the road cuts through like a sword."

I said that I was proud of him, and he turned suddenly and asked:

"Why, pray?"

"Because you have made a mark right here in this State: that's your road, the O. & W. N."

"Nonsense! It's the Rose and Hendricks gold that created it."

"Gold never created anything, Stephen; it's brains, and I'm proud of you."

He was very much pleased. He said, later:

"Baxfield's a queer chap, don't you think so? To rush off suddenly out of a State which he could sway to his will? They would have made him Governor if he had stayed. Do you know, my dear girl, I've thought it all out, and I believe he's gone East to be married! Nothing but love would take a man out of his element like this, and I must say that I've never seen it stop a career like this before. I think it's Fanny. The next thing we know we'll hear that your sister is Mrs. Richard Baxfield."

CHAPTER XLIV



THE little finger-ring was the first of Stephen's presents, but they came fast afterward. He liked to have packages sent out from the East, and I never opened anything until he was there to cut the strings and the seals, and to watch me. O. & W. N. had been put on the market long ago, and had luck—extraordinary luck and confidence—right through. When the road turned toward San Francisco, then Stephen's chiefs did come on—Judge Rollins and Mr. Rose and Mr. Hendricks and Mr. Thompson—and the old hack-stage fetched them to First Hotel as it had fetched us, and although we couldn't take care of them all at our house, still they dined with us, and it was "a big thing" for my husband. I cooked every bit of the dinner, from soup down to the pie. The colored boy had gone East with Judge Baxfield, but the girl we had made stay on at thirty dollars, just for the week the railroad chiefs were there in Oretown, waited nicely.

Senator Hendricks was perfectly splendid. I always said so, and stood up for him, no matter what his reputation was afterward. I was so excited and proud I couldn't eat a mouthful. Stephen sat at the head of the table, and they talked about Washington and the future, and Judge Rollins said:

"You've got *my* backing, Kirkland, skin and hide, if it will do you any good."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

And Senator Hendricks said: "I shall have the pleasure of contradicting you yet in the Senate, Kirkland." And Stephen's cheeks were red, and his eyes as bright as a boy's.

He had got wines for them and the best cigars, and siphons and Apollinaris, all sent out in cases; we had learned to keep everything out there. They wouldn't hear of my leaving the table after the ice-cream.

Senator Hendricks said: "Not any *champagne*, Kirkland, to wet a toast for the little road?"

My husband bowed and smiled, and lifted up his fizz-water. "This is my drink, gentlemen." Then some one turned the subject.

Of course they drank my health, and, as I looked at them, Stephen seemed to me the best of all, and I was proud of him. Mr. Thompson asked me if I knew I owned a thousand shares of the O. & W. N. Of course I didn't. Stephen hadn't told me: it was an anniversary present, he said. And I told the gentlemen that I was glad to have it, for I had watched the road grow from my window. I didn't take in what a thousand shares meant, but I began to the following year when the dividends came in. I put the most of it away, and Stephen never touched a cent of my money; he just turned the checks over to me, and I put it in the Carson City Bank.

The private car the gentlemen had come in had been switched off on to our little line, and I watched that go farther West. Stephen and I were invited to go out with them, but I wouldn't; I made him go alone. I knew that he would have a better time alone with the men, and he needed it; and up in the window of Judge Baxfield's spare room I watched the splendid Pullman and the one baggage

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

car and puffing engine pull off across our road, and I was certain Stephen looked back at the house as long as he could see it. And when the smoke came streaming like a flag from the locomotive and the bell clanged and the Oretown crowd cheered, I cried—I just *did*, I couldn't help it.

Miss Purchase was standing in the doorway when I turned. *She* was the servant! You *had* to call her Miss Purchase; she made you—she wouldn't stay otherwise, and it was almost impossible to get help out there. The first day she asked me to call her "Lady Diana," but Stephen roared so that she was a little ashamed, and so we compromised on "Miss Purchase." Well, when I turned round there she was, and she had been ironing and had the iron in her hand, bottom side up, and she had tears in her eyes, too. She was from Connecticut, and had come West to make her fortune.

"Mis' Kirkland, ain't it *grand*?" she whispered. "It seemed 's if I'd bust when that engine shrieked."

I didn't know she cared for anything on the face of the earth until that minute.

"I come up here to tell you that I'd stay—I meant I'd stay on. I don't keer for *money*," she said; "just give me a hundred a month and I'll stay." The tears ran down her face. "Mr. Kirkland's a real gentleman, a real tony gentleman, and you do the best you kin."

In what she said I saw her heart and that it was a good one, even if, like the rest of the pioneers, she *was* trying to make what she could out of the West. She was very independent and broad-minded, and when I answered, "All right," she said, "I mean I'll stay forever, not just a month—forever!"

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

And she has, as far as to-day carries our forevers along.

Then she spit on her finger, and touched her iron.

"M' iron's cold!" she exclaimed. "Lawsy me! And I've left Mr. Kirkland's shirt all sodgy, and I must skit along down-stairs."

CHAPTER XLV



WHEN Fanny went East, Stephen wouldn't hear of her working any more. He bought the little Brackettsville house and lot and gave them outright to Fanny, and a monthly income—enough to live and dress on. For the boy he didn't do anything, and Ferdie kept on where he was and paid his share. Fanny hardly said thank you to Stephen, but she accepted, and we didn't care. I really believe *I* would have let her work, but I'm hard. Work has never seemed to me the worst of it, anyhow. I hardly ever heard from Fanny except when she acknowledged the checks, as she always did, but I knew she was taking French and was very much thought of in Brackettsville, and that she made a first-rate home for Ferdie. She never told me any of her plans or anything that she did except the barest details, but I had letters every week from Ferdie and he kept me posted.

It was three years after Judge Baxfield had left us his house when I got a letter one afternoon in the five-o'clock mail. I was sitting in the arbor sewing. It was in September, and the red apples hung nearly ripe in the trees. Miss Purchase brought the letter with a bunch of bills and the grocer's book, and laid them on the rustic table by my work-basket. The letter was fat and in a strange hand, and it was on ship's paper with a red flag and seal. At first I thought it was from Pete, but he had no reason for going

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

on a line. When I opened it I saw it was from Judge Baxfield, dated the week before on the *Britannic*, and it began:

“MY DEAR LADY”—[that made me think of Mr. Sinclair for a minute]—“It will be just three years from the time I sat with you in the arbor of the old place when you get this letter. The weather is fine in our Western late Septembers, and there will be some shafts along the grass, and finer yellow shafts in the apple-trees. I know those trees, one by one. I planted them all. The creek will speak as it did the day I left you there, and be the only voice to disturb your quiet. I loved the place, and for that reason I gave it to you. It has been a pride and satisfaction, a triumph, to think your feet walk the paths I laid out, and tread my stairs and my rooms, and that your first home was made by me. When the time came that I could do so without too much lying and too much disinclination to be fair to her, I did what you honored me by asking, and married your sister. This is our wedding-trip, and I write to tell you of our marriage. Fanny is a beautiful woman; she is your flesh and blood. Just above the line over the ear, where the hair grows straight and less curly, there is a look of you; when I discovered this I asked her to be my wife. If this fulfilment of your wish pleases you, brings you any satisfaction or content, if the fact that your sister’s future is assured and protected in so far as I can assure and protect it, if this brings you any peace, I am rewarded.

“Believe me, my dear lady,

“Yours faithfully,

RICHARD BAXFIELD.”

I held the letter there in my lap for a while with my sewing. The sunlight, as he said, lay on the arbor and on the apples

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

and on his words. It made me feel very deeply and very still. I thought it was incomprehensible that a man could do a thing like this and do it for me. I couldn't understand it. It made me ashamed to think of what I had taken from him, and when I thought of Will and Mr. Sinclair I was more ashamed than ever. That night I told Stephen that Judge Baxfield had married Fanny, and they had gone off on their honeymoon to Europe.

"I am sincerely relieved," he said, "and sincerely surprised. I never expected Fanny to have the common sense to do a thing as genuine as this. Women like your sister, my dear girl, usually die old maids. It's women like yourself who marry, Esther," and I couldn't help asking him, "Why, Stephen?"

"Why, because you are the mothers of the earth, my dear girl, the reasons for the race, the excuse for being, the hearthstone and the arc."

I told him he was too silly for any use, and I wouldn't let him go on. You just couldn't get a sensible reply out of him when you wanted it.

"It's because we're the cooks and the nurses and the slaves," I couldn't help saying, and he looked at me very seriously:

"It's because you are the ideal women."

CHAPTER XLVI



STEPHEN'S interests ran through the district as far as Carson City. He went there often, and east to New York several times on short visits, but I never moved from Oretown until we had been there four years. I heard a great deal of O. & W. N., and it was rapidly nearing the time when all you had to say to people was "*the Big N.*" and they knew. It is a generally understood thing, I dare say, that Stephen bought the State and the district in the first election—out there money *did* talk always, no doubt about it, but it has the same voice everywhere; and no one who had not watched my husband as I had watched him in that crude little place would ever know how just he was, understood how popular he was, simply as a man. If he had been a poor man he would have carried the polls with the way they cared for him. From Miss Purchase, who nearly killed herself over his shirts, starching them—and nearly drove me crazy because she rough-dried and sent up my clothes pretty nearly as they were half the time—down to the blacksmith at the outskirts of the town where Stephen took his riding-horse to be shod, my husband was a general favorite. He treated every one politely, and often I have seen him standing talking with the school-mistress or some simple woman on a March day, the wind blowing through his hair, his hat in his hand, until I saw *neuralgia* on every hair of his

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

head! The women in Oretown never had a chance to flirt with him, though, for on "his branch" (as he called Oretown) he was too deeply absorbed to look at anything but law and politics.

When it came time to go through the State on the campaigning tours he went alone, and sent me telegrams that flew over the wires thick—at first, before he got too absorbed. I used to gather what I could from the Oretown *Cry*—his paper, of course, and crazy about Stephen. He was running for Governor, and Oretown was wild for him; most of the Democrats went over to his ticket, and such a lot of the city took the cars over to the capital that they had to run extra trains.

There wasn't a tale against my husband so old and worm-eaten but they raked it up against him, and if I had had any illusions about the man I married they would have been pretty well worn out on this campaign. Finally, poor Miss Pagee's story capped off the lot, and they told how she had drowned herself to escape scandal, and it made me *sick*—and they raked up his habits and the whole thing! Before the election I got a wire from Stephen telling me to come to Carson City, and at the same time there came a notice over from the Junction to say there was a private car rolled in for Mrs. Kirkland. Miss Purchase and I packed and shut up in twelve hours, and started. The train had directions to take the branch road. It was sunset, and when we passed beyond the old house, Miss Purchase and I in a private car, it didn't *seem as though it could be true*. Quite a way out we stood on the rear and looked back, and the sunset shone on all the Oretown windows as red as fire; but the blinds were shut in Judge Baxfield's house, the windows of our old room. When the smoke from the Birdsall Button Factory

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

had disappeared and Oretown wasn't any bigger than a piece of paper on the plain, Miss Purchase said:

"I've just about used up Oretown, Mis' Kirkland, ain't you?" But I told her that I loved the house and the garden.

"It's too small for *Mr.* Kirkland, 'tennyrate!" she said, and I understood that she thought I wasn't ambitious enough.

"*He's* risin' to a wider spere." She was awfully excited, her cheeks shone red as apples and her glasses glistened, for she kept them spick and span, like diamonds. "I hope to the Lord he'll get that 'lection," she murmured over and over again, and if Cornelia Purchase could have taken the stump, with her black bag in her hands and her glistening glasses on her nose, and told the district what *she* thought of Mr. Kirkland, why, she would have carried the State!

His party had taken a part of Knight's Hotel for him. He didn't meet me at the train, but I found him in the hotel, the room thick with smoke from so many kinds of cigars that I couldn't even smell his Swiss cigarettes. There were half a dozen men in the room, and the walls were stuck over with campaign labels and his table stacked with papers.

Stephen, his hands in his pockets, his head thrown back, stood there in a group talking, and I was awfully excited myself. It seemed as if a bell had been struck in me till I rang. Ever since the moment our train had put out from Oretown I had been keyed up. My husband was the finest-looking one of all, I thought, and I trembled when he said:

"Let me present my wife, gentlemen," and repeated their names; they shook hands with me, and I recognized Mr. Collins, and was very glad to see him. He had been taking charge of all the western part of the State for Stephen. Of those men there, there was scarcely one who later didn't

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

make his mark, and the same fire appeared to run through us all that night.

"Well, my dear girl," my husband asked, "how do you like the Big N.?"—and that was the first time I heard it called by the name by which now it is known the world over.

Judge Pollock, afterward a Minister to Portugal, said: "There's something here bigger than the Big N., Mrs. Kirkland, and I don't believe I need ask you what you think of *him!*" And he put his hand on my husband's shoulder. "We're going to pull off an election such as this State has never seen—a man elected by the opposition ticket. Half the State of Nevada are voting for *Governor Kirkland.*" And when he softly said those words something burned in my eyes, and I was glad to get away.

Stephen took me to our rooms. We had hardly shut the door when he turned to me and said:

"Esther, you've seen all the election stuff, I dare say, in the papers, but Watterson" (that was the name of the man who was running against him for Governor) "has got pretty much the same kind of hogwash to contend with. Things like this are all in the game. But I want to ask you something. Among other things, they said" . . .

He sat down in a big chair, crossed his legs, and lit a fresh cigarette. I took off my hat and my coat. I was tired, and wanted more than anything else to get a bath.

". . . They said that Miss Pagee" . . . He paused after the name, the first time it had crossed his lips since our vacation in the Adirondacks. He repeated the name, then cleared his throat. I didn't help him.

"There," he said, "read this," and took out of his wallet a clipping. It showed how he must have cared, to have cut out this special one. "Read that." I did, and then put

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

it down on my knee. "Well, *you* were there, Esther; *you* remember Miss Pagee, don't you?" He smoked a second, and then went on: "Well, *you* know, too, that this is all a falsehood. I wonder where she is. It is very hard on the girl."

I could scarcely believe my ears — that he *didn't know*; then I remembered the terrible state in which he had been, and how everything escaped him but his own fight for life and for decency and for place. Well, he had them all *now*, very—nearly—all.

"Why don't you tell me what you know, Esther?" And for a minute I was tempted to lie and spare him, but I didn't, and then and there I told him from beginning to end. It took quite a few minutes, and he never moved. He put his dead cigarette in a little ash-tray belonging to Knight's Hotel, a spread-eagle in brass, and there the dead cigarette lay beside his silk hat and his gloves, which he carried, but never would wear more than he could help. I couldn't bear to see him suffer. When I came to the end of my story I got up and went over to my bag and began quietly to take out the things.

"Why didn't you tell me this before?" Then he interrupted himself, and said: "But why in God's name *should* you? This has been reserved for an especial time. Ashes in the mouth—dust and ashes in the mouth." He walked up and down several times, then stood staring at me in the gloomy way he used to have of looking when the temptation was pressing him hard. "I want you to understand what I say when I tell you that it would give me no satisfaction now to be elected Governor of Nevada. If the citizens of this State vote against me it will be my just deserts. It wouldn't be much of a retribution; still it might be a commencement."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

And I said to him: "Stephen, you are talking about another man from the one at Paul Smith's."

"How do you mean?" he asked, sharply. "Explain yourself."

"Why, the man that rowed out on the lake up there at Paul's isn't the one that's running for Governor—this man has a right to his chance."

He made no reply, but rang for a bell-boy; and when he appeared with a pitcher of ice-water my husband gave him the spread-eagle ash-receiver with the half-smoked, black cigarette lying on it, and told him to take it away and bring him a box of Henry Clay cigars, and that was the last Swiss cigarette I ever saw Stephen smoke.

He was making speeches, then, every day, and immediately some one came and knocked on the door and took him out of the room, and I saw him drive off in a landau with Mr. Collins and two other gentlemen. But I couldn't see very well. They were laughing and talking together; the hotel waiters cheered; there was a big banner across the street under which they drove: "Vote for Kirkland and Congo—Clean Politics." And I saw my husband look up at the banner as he drove under it.

Purchase came in and helped me get my things to rights, but she was so full of talk and so excited that I sent her away as soon as I could, and laid down and took a nap. There was to be a dinner at another hotel for Stephen. I didn't expect him home until late, and I had my dinner in the room off a tray, and sat in my white camisole and skirt until late, watching the streets lighting up, listening to the extras and the voices.

It was after eleven when Stephen came in, dog-tired,

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

fagged to death, and the signs of exhilaration I had remarked had faded away.

"Well," he said, slowly, "this is the irony of fate, isn't it? I shall carry the State, there's not much doubt of it. I shall have a rousing majority, I dare say—I shall *withdraw my candidature to-morrow*."

For a minute I thought he had gone crazy from too much brain-work; his voice was hoarse, his eyes fixed on me without seeing me.

"I'm not fit for the trust the country gives me, Esther." His face was gloomy as the grave and his eyes were sad like a child's.

"It's useless to tell me other men have been in positions like this—I don't care: it's useless to tell me I'm no worse than my opponent—that's *his* business. The tragedy of which you have told me has opened my eyes. Late as it is, I shall refuse to run!"

I went up to him, and put both hands on his shoulders.

"Stephen Kirkland, you'll do nothing of the kind!"

"My poor Esther—"

But I cut him short: "Don't poor me! I'm proud of you, every inch of you. If ever a man deserved a good place, *you do*. How many men, do you think, have fought out what you have fought out and conquered?"

He gazed on me pityingly.

"You are all right, Stephen; what's past and gone is past and gone. As for Miss Pagee, she would be the last to wish you to ruin your career to make up for her folly."

"Don't," he murmured—"don't!"

It was the first time I had ever taken any voice in his affairs or given him any advice; but when I saw his career tottering, shaking on the verge of success, I couldn't help

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

it. Senator Bellars seemed once more to say to me: "I hold you responsible for his life, Miss Carey."

"I've been a rake and a drunkard, Esther—all that if you like, but I have never been an impostor."

"Rubbish, Stephen! Haven't they put all the vile things they could think of in the papers? Have you denied them?"

"No, not one."

"Well, then, if the State elects you in spite of that—"

"Why, they'd say I bought the polls." He shook my hand off. "No, no, this is a way to atone for her death."

"Stephen," I urged, "think of your poor party, of what you stand for—of your friends, and the shame you'll bring on the situation. You can't go back now; it's too late."

"On the contrary, it would be a regeneration. They will have such a revival as will clean politics from the boundary to Texas."

"Nonsense!" I answered, harshly. "You don't clean up politics by one man's making a fool of himself!" I was wild. Every second I expected him to ring for a bell-boy, late as it was, and send some kind of extravagant message, and I could see that, so far, I hadn't altered him. His eyes seemed to gaze back years to Paul Smith's, to that lake, and to have been smitten with the passing of a ghost. "You haven't any right to your own feelings, Stephen; you aren't an individual—you're a party."

"Go to your room, my dear girl," he begged; "Esther, for God's sake, leave me alone. I ask it as a great favor." He had gone over to the window and sat down in the chair I had left, and I followed him and knelt down by his side and took hold of his hand.

"Stephen, do you think you owe more to that dead woman than you owe to me?"

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"How do you mean, to you?"

"Why, I mean it will just plain break my heart if you give up your candidature."

He stared at me as if he had made a discovery. "A heart to break—Esther has a heart?" . . . He had never heard me mention my personal feelings on a subject, and it was a counter-irritant—a great surprise—a dash of cold water—a real shock. He said, slowly:

"You mean to say—"

"I mean, Stephen, *I am perfectly wrapped up in your career.*"

"Why, I didn't dream you cared, my dear girl. I never *knew* you even took an interest in what was going on—that is, actively."

"You thought I was content to stay in Brackettsville and have you practise law? Well, I'm not."

"I'm very much disturbed, Esther. Let me see my way clear."

And I followed up, "Why, it's not a man's past that counts for the country, it's what he *can* do." I had made him think of me. He was looking at me curiously, and the ghost that was dogging him and coming between him and realities drifted away.

"*You* ambitious—*you*," he wondered, slowly. "*You* wrapped up in my career?" He leaned over and made me get up from my knees. "You mustn't kneel, Esther; but, like your namesake, you haven't pleaded in vain." He drew me down on his lap and held me close to him for a second. There was a noise in the hall: the porters were taking up a drunken politician from the bar to bed.

"We must get some rest," he said; "it will be a hard day

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

to-morrow. And will you hand me one of those Henry Clay cigars, my dear girl?"

The voices outside—for two men had stopped in the hall-way—talked for us, and I could guess a little what Stephen had been going through. I knew he had suffered that day in Carson City as he had gone about his weary campaign; I knew he had re-lived those days up there, and could have drawn a picture, as I could, of that floating, breezy form, and that the lake must have struck as icy a chill to Stephen, very nearly, as it had to her.

Pretty soon he said to me, "You're right, my dear girl; that's the highest cruelty and irony of it—we *can't atone*; and I owe you, as you remind me, more than I owe to any one, and if to see me Governor of Nevada will give you the slightest satisfaction, my dear " . . .

It made me think of Judge Baxfield's letter: one man married another woman to give me pleasure, and now a second man was going to be Governor of a State for the same reason! I smiled, I couldn't help it, and I thought, well, if it gives either of you any pleasure to *think* it's for my sake—you're welcome! I don't care, as long as the things get done!

CHAPTER XLVII



IT began to circle out wide now — Oretown, near as it was to Carson City, got to be a speck, and we were far from it. Carson City turned out to be a bush for Stephen's ambition to rest on before flying higher. Carson City was always unreal, and I never felt that I lived there. I dare say I was dazed most of the time. My husband kept me busy, though; the house was full of callers—political people and secretaries and office-seekers, and what not, and Miss Cornelia Purchase saved my life. No doubt it was for the reason that the Governor's office was never meant to be permanent for my husband that he, himself, never liked Carson City and was sensitive to every little annoyance. He never felt at home a single day. There in that mansion I talked to him enough to make up for the years I had been so silent. He needed a lot of plain common sense salted down, and the little doses I gave him were disguised.

I never pretended to look after anything in the Carson City house. I gave up housekeeping, of which I was getting fond; I left everything to Cornelia Purchase, and she was wonderful. I got a bad name in the capital: they said that I threw money out of the window, and I would have done so fast enough if Stephen had come in at the door with a certain kind of look on his face. Cornelia Purchase, I

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

am sure, saved us from sheer ruin those days, for there was an economical streak in her that the discovery of a gold-mine under her feet wouldn't have taken out. Stephen wouldn't hear of economizing; he wouldn't let me ask what things cost in his presence. He had an idea that he had to have everything sent out from New York, and provisions came in car-loads until I told him that he was making a very bad impression on the State. I don't think we ever sat down alone to dinner. Everybody passing through came to dine at the Governor's Mansion, and, as he was not a bit of a snob, he asked all kinds of people and at all kinds of times. So I told them to be ready for as many as the table would hold every night. It cost a lot, but I'm glad to say I don't know how much we spent in Carson City.

Cornelia Purchase bloomed out into a housekeeper and a maid and a companion. I took to sitting in the up-stairs sitting-room window which looked down — Avenue, and I could see Stephen as soon as he turned in at the gate. The first word he said as they opened the door was, "Mrs. Kirkland at home?" I was never out, so it was just a form. Then I'd call, "Coming up-stairs?" It never varied. I don't think he'd remember it, but it stands out to me, for in all that time I don't think he ever came in like his real self—gloomy, heavy-eyed, and his head bowed. He had been struck through and through, in Knight's Hotel the week before election, with death. It showed how sensitive he was. He had an idea that politics was not his career, that he was a born writer, and he was dying to begin a new novel right then and there. Several times I found his papers scribbled over with names of chapters and *dramatis personæ*, and so forth; and at dinner, when some

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

one was waiting for him to answer an important question, I'd see him smile in his vague, quizzical way, and know that he was following some romantic idea or the line of a poem which would never come out, and which had to be crushed down as flowers are when the harvest reapers go in, crushing down the grain.

It hurt me, it made my heart ache, but it was too late—too late; there wasn't another branch like Oretown for a poet to pose on and fly away from, and our circles were starting out and widening, and we had to go along with them toward the shore.

I couldn't leave Stephen alone. I hardly ever made any calls except on a keen jump, and people thought I was stuck up and a snob (me!), and nervous as a witch, and poor company. I don't wonder. I never went out but I thought, What if he should come home and I be gone?—and when he asks, "Is my wife at home?" and they would say, "No, your excellency, she's up street"—why, Heaven knows what would be the issue. It made me think of Doctor Manette in *The Tale of Two Cities*. Stephen would have gone back, not to shoemaking, but to making books, and the party and his office might have flown to bits. Once well out of politics, I knew my husband would never think of them again.

The "party," though—it was perfectly splendid! There were real men in that political set, and they knew what they had in my husband; not one of them had the dimmest idea, though, of his state of mind. After his struggles between literature and politics he went back to his meetings fresh—his interest was so real in everything, and his talent so great, and his education and his genius made him wonderful when he did speak—he held them spell-bound. His

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

State and party took care of him, and had all kinds of ideas about his leadership and his power. And the Big N. was one of the most important speculations on the market. One night, when our dinner company had gone home and my husband and I were getting ready to go up-stairs from the parlor, he said:

"You are a rich woman, my dear girl. How does it feel?" And he went on to tell me that he had put every cent of money he had in my name; that I was to pay the bills and sign the checks and never let him know what he had or hadn't—that he didn't want money discussed.

"The only thing to my mind that is interesting about money," he said, "is that it saves you from being a bore to your friends, and, if you have enough, you needn't talk about it. It's coming in to us, Esther," he went on, "like the waves of the sea, amethystine-edged, and if there's pleasure in those crests, why, drink in the delight—it's all for you—don't tell me of money, I don't want to be bothered; only don't miser up anything. We've no children."

I began to speak of Fanny and her little boys, and he told me that Baxfield was in the Nevada deals and had no need of help of ours. And then Stephen said, "I shall see that he buys a block in the Wildwood Mines."

When he mentioned Wildwood Mines the word went all through me.

"Why, yes," he answered, when I spoke of it, "I told you of them, didn't I? They're going to sell before long at 200."

One day, when I was alone at lunch, they brought me in the mail, and I was glad to see that there was a letter from Petey, stamped Samoa. He hadn't written for ages, and I was awfully relieved. After I had looked at the stamp and

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

had cut it off for Purchase (who was collecting for some one in the Old Men's Home in Boston, "for a *ninmate*," as she called him—I knew it was her father, and she was ashamed to say so), I read Petey's letter. I read it many times, then I copied the address, tore the letter up and threw it in the waste-basket. The basket was under Stephen's table in his library, a nice, cheerful room, and I thought, "It's a queer piece of news to tear up in a Governor's library." Petey had married a colored woman in Samoa—*plain colored*, as far as I could gather, for he never beat round the bush, and, of course, didn't know how to soften the blow! It reminded me of the day at home when he told me about his debts and his drinking, and it seemed funny to have saved him for this. I felt perfectly dreadful. It didn't seem as if it could be real. I decided not to tell my husband, for I didn't know whether he would begin to rave about "the azure islands of the unpeopled seas," which was a line in one of his poems, or whether he would be fearfully angry. At all events, I was ashamed of my brother, and it didn't seem fair for the Governor of a State to be uncle to a nigger child. I never got over it—*never*! I used to wake up and think: What on earth is the matter with me, anyway? *Something* is wrong! And then I'd remember that it was Petey's negro wife, and it used to make me sick. I knew, anyway, that Fanny would be furious, and that gave me *some* consolation.

That same year Judge Baxfield replaced the incumbent at the court of Greece and became Minister to Athens, and Fanny went over from the Riviera to her new "*spere*," as Miss Purchase called it. Stephen was crazy over the photographs of Fanny's little boys, and he had me send those children everything you could imagine, from silver bap-

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

tismal cups to little American-made shoes, which he bought himself whenever he saw a pretty baby's shoe in a shop, regardless of size or color. I *knew* Fanny's children never wore them. Though the children were both boys, they didn't name either of them for Stephen. One day he asked me at last what news I had from my brother Petey.

"Isn't he coming home, Esther? I can find him a berth on land now, if he wants it."

And I told him Petey never mentioned anything about coming home.

"Send him a check, a good one—don't be close with the boy; send it with our regards. Raise Miss Purchase's wages, too."

"Why, she's getting a hundred dollars a month now," I said. "She'll be utterly spoiled." And he looked at me reproachfully.

"You *can't* ruin some brands, Esther! Do what I say; and buy yourself some jewels. Go down-town to-morrow and get a handsome solitaire diamond. Come," he said, laughing, "be a millionaire for me, and tell me how it feels, my dear girl!"

When we went up-stairs together I kept wondering—wondering about the Wildwood Mines, and Will, and what had happened to him.

CHAPTER XLVIII



THAT winter I felt as if I had succeeded in murdering a helpless child. I thought I had killed Stephen's art. Politics laid hold of him with all their fascination and all their force, and they have plenty of both. Mr. Collins never gave the Governor any peace—he inspired Stephen. I saw the big political scheme in the minds of Stephen's pushers and backers: Nevada wanted my husband in the Senate.

One bitter cold day Stephen went to a directors' meeting of the Big N. in —, to meet Senator Hendricks and Mr. Thompson in regard to the Wildwood Mines they were going to consider purchasing. He was likely to be away several days. There was sleighing, but I hadn't been out. The first day of his absence I heard the ring of sleigh-bells so loud and clear that it gave me a real Christmasy feeling, and I ran to the window of the front sitting-room to look out. A cutter with two horses hung with bells was before the door, and a man in a fur coat crawling out from among the furry rugs. He threw the lines to the boy, who stayed behind in the sleigh, and, as he came along the walk to the porch, *I knew him*, and was down-stairs before they could bring me up word. They had shown him into the library, and he stood there in his big, furry coat, his cap in his hand, and the first thing I thought was, "How gray he has

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

turned!" I shut the door. He didn't cry out as he used to do, or come forward. Bowed and strained, he held his hand out, and in mine it shook like a drunkard's.

"It must be nearly six years, Esther Carey, but time agrees with you."

I said how glad I was to see him. But he was strange to me and changed. His face had grown stouter, yet not to one of those quiet, full faces of contented family life. He seemed nervous, worried to death; it was unnatural, for Will had always been the easiest-going kind of a man, with no nerves at all. He threw his things down and asked me:

"Do you think I can see you alone—I mean to say could we talk like this for a while without a thousand infernal interruptions? *Just for once in six years?*"

I told him my husband was in — at a meeting, and his lips curved.

"I know the Governor has a board-meeting to-day," he said. "Big N. will go up five points to-morrow."

He sat down on the sofa and leaned his arm up along the back, while I sat opposite. It was like having a character out of a book returned to life to see him again, but he wasn't as my old dreams of him were—he was awfully changed. He ran his hand through his hair.

"Gray, eh? Gray as a badger? But I find you just the same," and he said it still with a curl of his lips. "You struck the right man, Esther Carey, after all, though God knows what I wouldn't have done with you or how far I might have gone!"

When I asked, "What have you been doing with yourself, Will?" he gave a wretched sort of laugh that hurt to hear. Luckily he wasn't looking at me directly; I could see he was absorbed in what weighed upon his mind.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"That's exactly what I've come to see you about," he answered, slowly. "I've played fast and loose with everything that came my way."

"How do you mean, Will?"

"Why, after I saw there was no good waiting for a virtuous woman who loved me to stand by, I took a sudden turn to the reckless women." He nodded gently. "I won't go into that vulgar story. It isn't your fault—I never blamed you. Then I married again." He stopped here, and looked, I thought, in his waistcoat for a cigar.

"Stephen's cigars are right here."

And he flashed out: "Don't you remember I don't smoke with you? I'm looking for a picture." He found a small photograph which he held tenderly between his hands. "I married a chorus-girl from the Bijou. We had a little time of hell, then she ran away with another lunatic and left me—with this." And Will handed over to me the picture of a sweet, sweet little girl—little bare neck and bare arms and little bare feet.

"Oh, Will!" I cried—"oh, *Will!*" And my heart melted up and ached over that picture with a pang as sharp as a mother might have had, I guess. She had his face and his eyes. I kissed the picture on the little bare neck.

"Beauty Bright," he murmured, "isn't she, Esther—Beauty Bright? Her name *was* Esther."

I couldn't speak.

"I kept straight as a string for a long while. I lived out West with the kid, making money hand-over-fist. Then she died."

I knew it. Will needn't have told it to me. I knew it from the minute I looked at the sweet, dear little face;

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

there was the Call in the eyes—and the Answer, too. It couldn't mean anything else.

He didn't notice my silence.

"After that—" He kept me waiting a long time, then of a sudden put his face down on his hands and stayed so. I went and sat by him on the sofa, and after a little he uncovered his eyes and I saw the tears on his face. Then he seized both my hands and laid them against his wet eyes.

"Thank you, thank you, Esther. But go back and sit as you were, my dear, or I can't tell you what I have come to say."

So I took my chair in front of him and he leaned forward to me, his hunted look on me.

"Things are in a pretty bad shape—pretty serious. I have been letting the whole business go, and running the wagon down-hill, and there's been a great smash at length."

"Money?" I asked him, and for the first time it seemed to me that my money could be some real comfort.

"Um!" he nodded, and drew his lips in.

"I've got money of my own, Will. I'm rich."

Then he stared, and made a repelling gesture.

"For God's sake," he breathed, "I'm not as low as that!"

Then I blushed like fire.

"I was interested in the Wildwood Mines. Do you remember? I made a lot of money out here, and little by little I sold my holdings, and when I married I had quite a fortune. *She* showed me all right how to get rid of it, though! Meanwhile, knowing my connection with Wildwood and my mining experience, several New York bankers intrusted me with big sums of money to invest in Wildwood when I should see fit."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

I had to say, "Go on, Will—yes, I understand you," for he waited so long here.

"Well," he finally continued, "I had every reason to believe, by the way things stood, that Wildwood would drop to 25, and that I could buy it in cheap; I banked on that, you see, and sold the whole business short. And instead of this, all the rumor of the Big N. interests combining with Wildwood fired the market. As soon as this got abroad, and Wall Street saw that a certain financial clique was interested in Wildwood, why, the blamed stock went up 75 points."

And here I remembered what Stephen had said to me about its going to 200 inside a week.

"Of course I am personally ruined," he said, "but that doesn't make any difference one way or another—only I don't want to go to jail, Esther."

"Will!" I cried out at him—"Will, what do you mean?"

He held my hands as if they were the ropes by which he was pulling himself to shore over the beating sea.

"No," he repeated, "I—don't—want—to—go—to—jail."

"Why should you? What do you mean?"

"Why, I was so sure of the state of Wildwood that *I put in all the intrusted money* when I sold short, and I've got to make an accounting of those funds this month."

I didn't speak.

There is something in the people you are fond of that, no matter what they do, makes you keep on caring; that's why it doesn't seem to matter to a woman about "the ideal man"—the *real ones* need her so awfully all the time.

Will didn't make any wild exclamation or go into any dramatics. He told me the tragedy and the weakness as it was.

"So you see how it stands, Esther. If by some miracle

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

Wildwood *doesn't* touch 25, as I thought it would before this deal—”

“What’s to be done?” I asked him. “What could be done about it, Will?”

“Why,” he thought out, slowly, “the Governor would be the man to know. A man like Governor Kirkland, men like him in his financial set, can and have manipulated the speculative interests in Wall Street for the past eighteen months.”

As Will said this, just then, he came into vivid contrast in my mind with my husband, and the difference between the two stood out in blinding contrast, while there Will sat clinging to my hands.

“It seems strange, doesn’t it, Esther? Imagine my speaking to you of *your husband* as a possible saviour for me!”

I didn’t answer.

“You had the right inspiration when you stood by Kirkland.” Then he added with a sudden change of tone, as though he were coming out of a dream, letting my hands free: “Understand me, Esther, I have faced this out alone with a revolver by my side, but I can’t kill myself. For the sake of that little picture I want to live on, and make good, and keep out of jail. A man who has been a father knows what I mean. I *had* a child—I am not a heathen—I believe in the next world.” The little photograph lay in my lap, and Will took it and held it as he had held my hands, almost crushing it, yet so tenderly. “I want to see her again, to meet my little girl—straight—not with a prison stench on me.”

“Oh, Will,” I cried, “don’t, don’t!”

“Do you care, Esther,” he asked—“ever so little?”

I *didn't* care in any way that could have comforted him, and I don’t know what I answered. Nevertheless, he said:

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"Bless you, bless you, you're a woman such as men would die for."

He put the picture in his pocket, and seemed to straighten up a little, and took his things. Outside, for the first time since he had come in, I heard again the ringing of the sleigh-bells.

"I drove over from the Ural Mines, where I had business. You wouldn't get your hat and coat, and muffle up, would you, and take a turn with me?"

Nobody in Carson City knew who we were that day. I borrowed from Miss Purchase a veil black as death itself, and wound it round my face, and drew a fur collar up to my chin. We flew through the upper town and out on to the driveway, and the horses went like mad, and Will was as white as the snow itself; and under his cap and over his eyes his hair was white with blowing snow. I sat close to his furry arm. The air came icy to our lips. That ride was like a race toward some place to which we were trying to get back—some place we would never see again. I didn't feel a bit that Will was reckless or would be glad if the horses should run and throw us out and settle things that way. On the contrary, I was certain he had something before him which he was determined to do, and I liked him all the better for it. I thought of the painting in the Metropolitan Gallery that he had shown me—the soldier coming home from the war, bleeding and weak; and the sad part was that there was no woman belonging to Will to take him in and nurse his wounds.

Will had told his boy to meet him at Knight's Hotel, and I got out below and walked home. I left Will Falsworth in a side-street, holding out his hand bidding me good-bye.

CHAPTER XLIX



MY husband's meeting called to discuss the buying of the Wildwood Mines was on for the following day. I got Miss Purchase to telegraph out of a clear sky, "Come home at once." It was the most daring thing I had ever done. He should have arrived at midnight. I sat in his library reading, and on every page I kept seeing that dear little face of Will Falsworth's child. I hadn't planned out anything to say to Stephen, and I didn't know what to begin with in order to excuse my summons to him, and I never asked myself what such a peremptory message might mean or how frightened he might be. I had them make a fire and leave a big scuttle of coal, and I sent Cornelia Purchase to bed. I was nervous, and as I sat there listening to the coals drop down and the clock tick, I seemed to see the face of Will's child in the radiance of the fire. I thought of Will and what the years had done to him, but nothing was real to me, and I couldn't hold on to any thoughts that made Will real. I couldn't make myself follow along with his struggle and his failure, but when the idea of the child came—why, I just knelt down by its side! Then and there I knew that I was fond of children. The rest of the time I thought of Stephen—I could make *him* real enough!—the room where I waited for him to come home every day was full of him:

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

boxes of Henry Clay cigars, his books, and a pile of unopened Washington papers. We took every paper out, I used to say, and there was a copy of the *Forum* with an article about "The Governor of Nevada." Well, it had been all I could do to make him take the Governor's chair and stick to it, and the more I thought of how important he was the wilder my telegram seemed. Stephen certainly would think that the house had burned down or that I was dead. I wished that I could be really ill, but I couldn't even scare up a headache, though my nerves were excuse enough, goodness knows!

At midnight, when I heard the sleigh drive up, I looked out between the shades and the window and saw Stephen arrive, bundled up as Will had been. He stopped to speak to Sullivan, the man—to get a match from him, and stood to light his cigar outside. That act cheered me and made me a little mad as well. I argued he couldn't be frightened and light a cigar, though I knew, of course, Sullivan at the station must have told him I wasn't dead.

He came slowly up the walk, big and dark in his long coat, and our furnace-man let him in.

"Well," I called from the top of the stairs, "coming up?"

And when he had reached the sitting-room, and I saw how big he was, how quiet, and how distinguished in the astrachan-lined coat, and his dark, sleek head, and his big, dark eyes above the fur collar, *I was proud of him down to the ground!* He smiled at me peacefully.

"Good-evening, my dear girl." He took off his coat and gloves. "I expect Ferguson will lock up all right, won't he?" And I said of course, and how early the train was—it wasn't due for half an hour.

"I took a special engine," he replied, calmly; "*that's* the

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

reason. I'm frozen. What an infernal climate. I don't believe the United States was ever meant to be inhabited! Esther, what have you got for me to eat? I never come in from any place, my dear, but I'm grateful for a home. Wouldn't you call me distinctly a domestic animal?"

Ferguson brought up a tray that Miss Purchase had fixed.—cold bird and salad. When he had eaten, and drunk two bottles of ginger-ale, he began:

"The boys sent a delegate to meet me. There isn't a finer set of men in the West than the political party behind Collins and the others." Across the tray he put out his slender hand to me. "Shake hands with Senator Kirkland, Esther! I told you when we were in Washington that I should return, and in what way I was willing to do so. How will it please you?"

He went on to give me further details of the campaign. He was to resign his governorship and enter the United States Senate at the next election. He sat back in his chair, put his hands in his pockets, and stretched out his legs. He seemed ten feet long, so thin and slender.

"One thing annoyed me, Esther—the Wildwood Mines deal." He smoked a few minutes, and continued: "Hendricks and Thompson, Rose and the rest of them, have set their minds on this special purchase, and I have let myself be influenced, partly from indifference, partly because I have never felt myself to be a fixture in Nevada, and I have been bored and let things drift; but I am averse to this purchase and the floating of the company."

"Why, Stephen? Isn't it a good thing?"

"No," he answered, shortly, "not as it stands. The out-

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

put of the Wildwood Mines in no wise justifies the scheme on foot."

"Then they held the meeting?" I asked.

"It was to have been held after dinner to-night, but the boys took this occasion to buttonhole me and pin me down. They made me give my word to run for the Senate."

He knocked his ashes off against the chair on the carpet—he never broke *that* habit, anyway. "There is only one way to make the Wildwood Mines a success," he said, "and that is to reorganize from A to Z, buy in the adjoining tracts, form a new company under a different name, and float the stock at par."

"Well," I asked, "they'll do what you say, won't they?"

"Not by a jugful," he laughed. "Rose and Hendricks don't half think me the man my backers and you think me, Esther. They're worth a hundred times as much money as I am, and they are years older, and have back of them all the experience I am to gain."

"Not one of them has the talent you have, Stephen."

He bowed his thanks, and answered: "Well, they are wrong about Wildwood, at any rate." And he took up the *Washington Post* and ripped off the band. Now, I thought, if he goes to reading! For when he did read it was as bad as anything else—you couldn't get him away from the book or the article. However, he only opened the paper and laid it down on his knee. "You know what a weak coward I am, Esther, in many ways, don't you? I assure you I have dreaded to-morrow's committee meeting. I had gone so far I couldn't very well have dropped out, but I am confident now I should have made the mistake of my life. I've no time to attend to new financial schemes, to begin with,

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

and I shall need all my force and energy for this election. As for Wildwood, it isn't worth it—it isn't worth it."

Once again I asked him if he had no faith in it at all, and he answered: "The stock was down to 25 before we stirred up the country, and, at any rate, for the present I honestly think 25 is all the stuff is worth. The present rise is purely fictitious." He was now behind the newspaper; it was like winding out of a labyrinth to listen and discover what I needed to know.

"Have you said all this to any one else, Stephen?"

"What?" he answered, absently. "Said what, pray?"

"That Wildwood isn't worth over twenty-five dollars a share?"

"Under the circumstances—hardly."

"It might get into the papers, Stephen."

"I'm sure it's a matter of perfect indifference to me whether it does or does not." He laid the paper down. "I should have tried to infect the meeting to-morrow with my ideas, but it would have been in vain, for when Rose gets an idea about making money it's like a dog on the scent—you have to let him go for it or ruin his breed. I was never so glad in my life, my dear girl, as when your telegram came. I sent a chap running over to the station to order a special put on. It was Providence. By-the-way, *why* did you send it?"

"Then there was surely to have been a meeting to-morrow?"

"It's put off now until next week, at any rate," he said, "as I couldn't tell what my news from home might be, and I was unable to promise them anything. But now that your despatch has given me time, and I have accepted the nomination, I shall definitely get out of the Wildwood."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"But if this is generally known, Stephen, and published about, won't it be bad for the stock?"

"Bad!" he exclaimed, irritably. "But I've been telling you, my dear Esther, I think the stock isn't worth the paper it's written on!"

"Well, will it do you any harm to have it publicly known that you withdraw from the purchase?"

"No," he reflected, slowly, "I'm inclined to think that, under the circumstances, it would do me good. But," he added, "you haven't told me what was the matter. Why did you send for me?"

I just looked at him.

"Sullivan told me at the station there wasn't anything the matter that he knew of. What has happened?"

"Did I frighten you?"

"For the moment, yes. Then I knew you so well that I argued, 'If Esther's *ill* she'd say so!' And I decided that you had thought, for some reason or other, that it was for my best interests to be at home. Now, what *was* it?"

"Why," I answered him, "I had a sort of feeling about the Wildwood Mines."

My husband was so honorable, so clear-minded, that he absolutely believed me, and exclaimed, with interest:

"Why, how very curious, Esther! How curious! I never knew you were superstitious."

I felt perfectly dreadful, like a traitor, like a thief. And I asked him again to assure me that it would do him no harm if it were known that he felt as he did about the deal, and he said:

"Since this thing has gone so far now, and I have said so much to you, I'll go on to say that this is the last financial deal that I shall ever touch with Rose and Hendricks. I

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

saw Hendricks just as I was leaving —— and told him in a few words my opinion of the Wildwood affair, and he laughed; *he* doesn't agree with me, of course."

As we went up-stairs to our rooms together my husband said: "Two great tragedies of history might have been avoided, you know, if Cæsar and Pontius Pilate had respected their wives' superstitions."

And I thought to myself: "He doesn't dream what tragedy *has* been avoided."

Stephen's opinion of the Wildwood Mines got into the papers in a plain statement. No one ever knew how the note crept in, and the Oretown *Cry* puffed him up about it, and they say it did make a difference in the feeling of the State toward him. It came out about the time of his nomination, and from then on Rose and Hendricks were his mortal enemies. They worked for all they were worth against his nomination, but he went into Congress with an overwhelming vote and much good-will—but he went in with enemies.

Some day, I thought, I'll tell him. He didn't need the millions that were made and lost in the Wildwood speculation. After the reports in the papers the stock fell below 25, and whether or not it touched its legitimate level I do not know—but I do know that one man who had sold short was satisfied, and that he paid back what he owed.

CHAPTER L



FROM then on we seemed to have been carried along, lifted up—and picked up—and set down: and when the first more quiet times came, months afterward, when I could breathe, the repose of success went straight through me, right down to my boots. Speaking of boots, I could take pleasure in mine now. Shoes were my great extravagance. I had lots of slippers and shoes, and on a day I specially remember I had on kid slippers with high heels and buckles, and I wore silk stockings, open work, thin as a cloud. Fanny brought me back lots from Paris. This day her children were playing on the floor of my bedroom. They had a French nurse and spoke broken French. Fanny was out making calls in our carriage. She had arrived from Greece the day before, to stay a few weeks in Washington with the children; the Ambassador had remained behind in Athens.

Our house on — Street doesn't need me to describe it. It was like a wonderful book-cover, waiting for the new volume to be slipped in while the Administration read the book through. Our personal history slipped in with the last Administration, and a lot of brilliant people came in with the new President. It isn't good taste, perhaps, to say what Stephen was among them or how he towered; he won hearts and held men's minds even in this moment of stress and mental tension, and he passed through the Senate

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

like a flame. The records tell about it, and lots of people have said he was the most brilliant speaker since Webster. We took the house just as it was from the Sheratons, English people who had come to see a Washington season—and they saw it! Lord Sheraton got mixed up with the Trust fusses and was ruined, and he left his beautiful things, and we took the place as it stood. It had been the Roxburgs' house before, but it was richer and mellower now, and more subdued. The day I walked up the steps and in for the first time to my house I grew faint, and the Roxburg dinner-company confusion came back, and Mrs. Roxburg, big and handsome, and me in my Worth gown, were vivid once again. I have worn Worth gowns since in that house, but never such a pretty one as that first dress. There had been a glamour over it, and the light never died. I had it on in the bedroom in M Street when I called my husband "Stephen" for the first time.

Fanny was prettier than ever, with a *fast* prettiness, and she knew it—she said herself her eyes and her hair were "fast." But she was a charming woman, and did credit to her position. She had grown foreign, and talked in a foreign voice, like Miss Pagee, only more so, and put red on her lips and dark on her eyes, and laughed up high and flashed her rings, and manicured all the time. I told her I didn't see how she could help making her nails sore. Her rooms—we gave them the upper floor—were full of pictures of foreign personages—kings and queens and princes. The eldest boy was named after the Crown Prince of Greece. It never seemed to do him any good, though, for his godfather only gave him a signed photograph on the day of his christening. In her sitting-room were little lace pillows everywhere on the chairs and sofa, and she had

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

flowers sent in daily for her vases. She never let her little boys play in her sitting-room, so I could have them all I liked.

"Esther," she said on this special day that I remember, "come into my *boudoir* with me, won't you, and let Félicité take the children. You'll spoil my rules. Foreign children aren't in the least around as we used to be."

"Well, Fanny," I said, "I don't know what they would have done with us if we hadn't been 'around'; there *wasn't* anywhere else."

"Brackettsville again!" she cried. "Can't you let the old, dreary horrors be? Heaven knows we've got enough else to talk about, Esther."

"Yes," I answered, "there are fifteen servants' wages due to-day, and I've got to write the checks."

She told me that I should have a secretary to begin with. She had on a beautiful dressing-gown, like an evening-dress, and among her pillows she looked like a princess herself.

"My poor Esther," she murmured, "how will you ever pull this thing off? I mean," she explained, "how will you carry your husband and the social part of his career? You don't know, you don't realize, what a fearful responsibility—"

"That's what Senator Bellars told me years ago, Fanny."

"You've improved immensely," she conceded. "I didn't know you at all at the station. Your *clothes* can be managed." . . . She was awfully serious. . . . "You don't mind my saying these things, do you, Esther?" I assured her that I did not, and that I knew she had learned a great deal about things abroad, and I looked round the room.

"I suppose *these*," I said, meaning the signed photographs, "went with your duties at the Embassy?"

She looked a little annoyed.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"I've had a wonderful time everywhere. You must get a secretary first of all, and a maid." She waited.

"Well, Fanny," I answered, "I never knew a time when there weren't a lot of applicants for both those situations. As for a secretary, I'd like one, but if a maid came Purchase would tear her eyes out."

"And you should have your hair done every day until you get it into training."

"It will never be like yours, Fanny."

"Perhaps not," she admitted, "but it will be conventional, at any rate."

"I *won't* dye my hair," I said, firmly, "not if Stephen has to leave the Senate!" And she laughed.

"Who wants you to? You'll have it curled, won't you?"

And I said yes, but that I'd rather do it up in papers and pinch it myself.

"You'll have to give dinners and lunches and call everywhere and be up on everything, and have more manner, Esther—can't you?"

I said no, I was afraid I couldn't; I would have to stay the way I was.

"It's too bad," she said, and seemed deeply disappointed, "because you are not dull, you know." Then she gave me up, right then and there, because some one brought in a note which she read like lightning and re-read again, and jumped up to answer while the man waited. It took her ten minutes. She rang for her maid and said she would have to dress, that a friend from Rome was in Washington, that he had just sent round to say that he would be over in an hour, and as far as my social struggle was concerned, Fanny gave me up. As far as elegance and manners went, I had to work them out for myself; she never bothered

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

about me again. Many times there were questions I *would* have been really glad to ask her, for she had learned a lot abroad, but she was too busy from then on. She had her own set and her own friends, and Count di Falleri was one of them. That first afternoon he called he stayed two hours. The hair-dresser came that afternoon and I had my hair done by him, and every separate pin stuck in me like a live wire, and my cheeks were hot from the nervous strain of it.

I was ashamed to come down-stairs as I was, but I made up my mind to do exactly as Fanny had said, and look the best I could for my position. She had asked the Count di Falleri for dinner, and there were two friends of Stephen's—Mr. Collins and a man from Nevada. I came into the drawing-room a few minutes before dinner, and Stephen stared at me. He hadn't seen me before. He came over to me quickly, and under his breath he said:

"For God's sake, what has happened to you, my dear girl?"

"I guess it's my hair, Stephen. Don't you like it?"

He made a queer sound in his throat. "Go up-stairs," he whispered, "and take that horror off your head. We'll go in, and you come down when you are ready."

The horror was my own hair! I was never so glad of anything as to get those pins out. Nobody noticed anything but Stephen, and afterward he said to me:

"Remember, Esther, I never want you to change one iota of your looks or yourself. Buy all the clothes and jewels you want. I like to have you spend money. Leave your face and your hair alone."

It was a great relief.

"But Fanny—" I began. And he interrupted me:

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"She is a different piece of goods, my dear girl. I cut the cloth off the *Carey bale* where I chose! There isn't an artificial crimp or a *mouche* that doesn't enhance the beauty of certain women. Your sister belongs to the eighteenth century; she's a bit of exquisite prettiness. *You* are elemental. *You're the best in the world as you are.* Stay so."

I was very much pleased.

I thought of this many times—many times; and took what pleasure I could out of it when the beautiful women he admired and the brilliant women who hung upon his words and the fascinating women who magnetized him, sat at our table and had him at theirs. I thought about these words when he came in late and when he didn't come home at all, and when Fanny and Count di Falleri were out together, and I was alone and could have the children as much as I liked.

CHAPTER LI



THAT first year in Washington there was a long session of the Senate, and, although Stephen was new and from one of the most western States, still he at once began to attract to him the attention of his party, of his contemporaries, and his constituents all seemed to feel that their affairs were in the right hands. I wondered, the first day that I heard my husband speak, how his uncle felt, for Senator Bellars, the other representative of Nevada, sat there looking at my husband, and I could see them both from the Members' Gallery, where I had taken my place.

About four o'clock that afternoon I was in the drawing-room with the children when the butler announced Senator Bellars. He came across the room fast—came like a friend who has been a long time away, and is glad to get home and see you. Before he reached me he caught sight of Fanny's little boys, who were just big enough to walk about—there was only fifteen months difference between them.

"God bless my soul!" he cried. "*Children?*" and sort of stooped down.

I shook my head. "Not ours—they're my sister's little boys."

He held his hand out to me over them, and his face was perfectly wonderful, like a rugged cliff with a light shining on it suddenly, as if the thought of Stephen's children had

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

cast a glory over our meeting; just that idea of the race going on, the look that only life can bring.

"I've come to thank you, Mrs. Stephen Kirkland, not to beg your pardon." He glared at me as he used to do, and I was nearly ready for him to begin to dictate when he said, shaking his fine head:

"She doesn't know it — doesn't dream it. I thought to-day, when I listened to your husband speak, 'My God, *does* she know?' But of course you don't. Well, if you had the kind of a mind that *could* for a moment be vain, the man I heard speak in the Senate would be dumb to-day."

He didn't drop my hands; he held them as though they were precious.

"You've changed a vast deal, Mrs. Kirkland; there's no doubt about it. When I first saw you, you were such a demure, meek little thing, such a dove-like creature." He laid his hand on my hair as a father might, and it made my heart beat. "You're the same gentle creature, honest, confident, patient; there's the same beauty there, but it's deeper." He bent and kissed me quite solemnly. "There," he said, "Esther, I've made you cry. I believe you don't do that often."

"You've a great position to fill here," he said, after we had talked quite a while, and he said this differently from my sister—as though he thought perhaps I could fill it. "Stephen's fortune, his position, will make him one of the men of the moment if he chooses. Your house will be full, and your heart and mind too. It will be a great experience."

I asked him to advise me, and he said:

"Be yourself. I *can* tell you some people to avoid and some to seek; but I know only one woman in Washington

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

who is worthy to be your friend, your intimate friend, and she may be of service to you—Mrs. Sidney Tempest; her husband is Speaker of the House. I'll send her to see you to-morrow," and he rose. He wouldn't wait for Stephen, and I didn't urge him. I understood how he felt. Stephen should go to see him now; he had done his part in coming to tell me we were friends.

CHAPTER LII



THE whirl of it all went round me like a storm—things I must do, things I mustn't; what would be good for Stephen and what wouldn't be; and in a little room upstairs—you couldn't call it a boudoir; there were no signed photographs—I used to shut myself and think of it, and there the wind would calm down. My husband loved the social life, that I could see. And he developed on every side, and he was fast developing into the sort of man that it would be difficult for a woman to keep up with.

I had a secretary, and I chose a man, a Mr. Van Buren, who came to solicit a place from Stephen, and I said, "Let me have him." He was a kind, calm, peaceful, brow-beaten sort of a man. I always thought he had a history, but I didn't have time to find it out. He came from a decayed New York family. He had written books on etiquette, and did the blue books and the red books for Tiffany, and such things as that. I grew almost fond of him, and so did Cornelia Purchase.

In the flurry my clothes came out pretty well. As soon as I saw that Fanny was too busy to be of any use, I went back to the place where Mrs. Margrette had bought my Worth gown. I put myself in their hands; it used positively to hurt me to spend money the way I did. I couldn't make it seem right—I wasn't used to it. But I didn't dare speak to Stephen. As for putting by for rainy days, well,

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

it was the green-lined-cotton-umbrella time and the sunshade time, and I put mine up and just kept in the glare! Stephen had his Directors' Board and his financial interests and his politics, and he was never ruffled or disturbed. He was perfectly charming and distinguished and calm. Things in a way couldn't have been any harder for any man than they were for him, or more easy as well. About this time I heard the expression "temperament" used. I found that it explained a lot and was a sort of cloak to cover a multitude of things that in old times we'd just have called plain *wrong*. He liked open house and sudden entertaining; and, as I had done in Carson City, I told Mr. Van Buren to see that the table was always ready for from eight to ten people. Of course, we had regular dinners when we knew who was coming, and those got to be celebrated and very much sought after. Fanny was fearfully pretty, and her clothes lovely. In her tulle ball-gowns that year she used to look like a drift of snow, her sparkling, brilliant little head above the white. I looked to the menus with Van Buren, and I discovered that I knew what was good to eat and how to get it, even if I had used to lunch on ten cents a day for more than ten years.

Mrs. Tempest came to call the week I saw Stephen's uncle, but I was out, and she asked us within ten days for dinner.

"Tempest," Stephen said to me, "they tell me, is a wife-made man. So was Roxburg. Out of mediocrity Mrs. Tempest has pulled this fellow into position. I am curious to see her; I've heard my uncle speak of her often."

The Tempests had a handsome old house on I Street; my husband took the hostess in to dinner, and I went in with an Englishman, the first one I ever met, I couldn't under-

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

stand him hardly at all; it was like a foreign language, pretty nearly. The moment I looked at Mrs. Tempest, and she gave me her hand and spoke to me in her rich, low voice, something went all through me. I recall her dress that night, of white satin, creamy, like ivory, and no color. At her breast she wore one big gardenia, and after that night she only wore violets. Her hair was nearly black, so dark and heavy that it seemed aching to get loose from the pins and roll down; she wore it loosely and held up by large shell pins. Her color was warm red under a bloomy skin, with the glow of what Stephen used to call "a sunset peach." Her lips were carved out boldly, with dents in the corners of her mouth, and so sharp a point on the upper lip that it made you want to put your finger there. Her eyes kept her from being boldly beautiful; they were soft and shining under her straight, fine brows, and her neck and her arms were maternal, where children would want to nestle and put their heads; and I wondered if she had children, and, if so, how she could *wear a dress like that*. I had thought Fanny's too low, but Mrs. Tempest was so beautiful that I forgave her. She had no age, she was just superb and brilliant, and Stephen by her side at table turned to her as if she were a sun. I saw it, and right then and there I knew what was going to be.

There were several Cabinet Ministers and a visiting Prince, and Mrs. Tempest shone over the table and put every one at ease. I said to myself, "I'll watch and see how *she* entertains," but I gave that up. She had *begun* where I could never get! And then, too, my heart went out so to my husband as he turned to her that I didn't call it "*enter-taining*" after the soup was taken away. Besides, I didn't have time to observe her any more, for I found out that

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

Washington wasn't Carson City, and I had to take a decided place at once. The men on either side turned to me and began to ask me questions.

After dinner nobody stayed behind in the dining-room to smoke; Mrs. Tempest didn't have it that way. They strolled into the big library, and I found a sofa behind a table, and the room shook itself out round me, the people seeking their friends in groups and pairs, and before I realized it I, myself, was part of a circle, and couldn't blot out my personality. The Englishman and Mr. Tempest and Senator Bellars, who had come in after dinner, and a secretary, stood in front of me, and Senator Bellars dictated at me, and we all talked, and I had to. And then and there I found I didn't hate it as much as I had feared.

Stephen came up and joined us, and seemed to have taken an elixir more stimulating than wine. When the man who was speaking when he joined us stopped, my husband took up the subject and went on with it. And I was proud to have him there, and prouder to watch them listen and watch their faces. When he talked nobody else seemed to have reason for existing.

One by one the others said good-night, and Stephen and his uncle and I were alone; they hadn't spoken directly to each other, so Stephen put out his hand:

"Uncle, I owe everything to you."

Senator Bellars dropped Stephen's hand like a hot coal, and he put his head back and gave a short, sharp laugh.

"Yes, yes," insisted my husband, earnestly, "you sent for me to France at a critical moment—you shaped my career."

Senator Bellars glared at him, then looked more softly to me, and murmured:

"Blind as most egoists! But it's evident, my dear boy,

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

that you haven't gone as high yet as you will. Perhaps when you *do* get at the top, you'll—"

Stephen was quite unconscious of what his uncle meant. "I want, above all, uncle," he said, "to go on with some books of yours that I was absorbed in when you put me out of the Fifth Avenue house some years ago. I wonder if you have got them in Washington? You'll let me come and see, won't you?"

I could see that his uncle was perfectly delighted to see him again. There hadn't been anything dramatic or booky about their meeting; nobody wept on each other's neck, and yet there was something touching to me in it as I saw them shaking hands.

We women would be saved a lot of bother, it seems to me, if we could learn we are not so important after all. We get spoiled by the men often, and our heads turned: it was as plain to me as the nose on your face that Mr. Baxfield was simply crazy about his wife. Fanny talked about her husband in a patronizing way: she seemed to think she had done him a great honor in marrying him. He wrote her pages and pages every week and he worshipped the two children, and it seemed an awful shame to me to watch Fanny's flirtations. She accepted, finally, an invitation from some people with whom she had crossed on the ship to go West in a private car. The Count di Falleri was invited, and she left the children with me. I never saw my husband as angry as he was when he heard that she had gone, for he really hadn't bothered much about Fanny, and neither of us discussed plans with him. He said that she was a wretched wife and mother, and that he wouldn't have his house made a rendezvous, and I almost wondered if he weren't a little bit jealous that she should have wanted to

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

go. Driving home that night from the Tempests' dinner Stephen told me that he didn't admire Mrs. Tempest's type.

"She's too sensuous," he said, "too extravagant, luscious. She represents the stormy part of a man's career. Every man," he went on, "has his special type. You'll find that out, and he rarely admires out of it."

"Well," I thought to myself, "Miss Pagee and Fanny and Mrs. Tempest are all the same kind of woman, only Mrs. Tempest is the most beautiful of them all." I asked him if he didn't think she was intelligent. He said:

"Very, and very charming. My uncle admires her. She has the social gift. She is a perfect hostess. I don't know when I've been in such agreeable company." And he added: "I dare say she will be a valuable friend for you this year if you cared to consult her." Then he went on talking about other things, and going home he held my hand. It was a fine night for winter, the streets were still, the sky overhead blue and bright with stars. He looked so big and dark sitting there in his long coat, and I remembered how people's eyes had sought him at the Tempests', and how he had been listened to. And it seemed to me as though Stephen could get anywhere. And I had the knowledge that he belonged to me; and, in spite of Mrs. Tempest's beauty, I wasn't unhappy that night.

I planned next day to do a long-postponed errand, and took the carriage and drove to — Street, and was just getting out when I saw Mrs. Tempest come from Galts', the jewellers.

"Why, what errand can you be bent upon, Mrs. Kirkland? You look so"—and she paused for a word—"so *radiant*."

And I said: "I *am* radiant. I am going in to buy a solitaire diamond ring."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"Heavens!" she laughed. "You speak as though a solitaire were a pound of tea! But no doubt it is in reality a good many pounds of Sugar."

And I answered, "No, my husband isn't in on the Sugar deal," for every one in Washington thought he was.

"I don't often come up with people bent upon such brilliant errands," she went on.

I thought her, then, like a well-painted portrait, the fur in her dark hat coming down on her dark hair, and a big bunch of violets in her coat.

"Mayn't I go to Galts' with you? Do let me! I am awfully discreet."

I told her I would be glad if she would help me; I wasn't a judge of stones, and I had to buy the ring this morning—I couldn't put it off any longer.

"It's for some friend's engagement, I expect."

And I said no, my husband had told me to buy this stone long ago in Carson City, and I actually hadn't had time yet!

She exclaimed: "Oh, *really!*" And we went into Galts' together. Mrs. Tempest asked for the manager, and we were shown into a private room. The head salesman got out tubes and cases and tissue-papers full of stones from the safes. And we two sat down to choose my ring—a black velvet cushion between us.

It took a long time. Personally, I would rather have looked through the show-cases and selected something quietly by myself, but Mrs. Tempest was kind and interested, and tried the rings on, and her hands were large and ample, with pointed fingers and palms like flowers. Their tips had never been spoiled by the keyboard of a Remington.

"This stone," she said, at last, "is superb, isn't it? I

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

should certainly advise you to take this one, Mrs. Kirkland," and as she turned it round on her finger it did gleam like a star. I put it on above my wedding-ring.

I took Mrs. Tempest to her house in our carriage, and went back home to lunch. When my husband returned for tea, late, I showed him my new ring.

"All right, Esther; it's a good stone, I dare say." But he scarcely looked at it as he added: "Do you know, I think that Mrs. Tempest can be of enormous value to you. I wish you would cultivate her, my dear girl."

He had sent her the violets she wore that morning in her coat, and I learned the fact when the flower bill came from the little man around the corner. There were lots of flowers during those months, as well as a hundred dollars' worth for her; but the most costly of all to me was that first bunch of violets—like a purple blot it lay on the bill. One of the strange things about it all was Stephen's sending the bill home with the bills for the rest of the household flowers. He had never sent me a rose in his life, not a single flower. I had bought a diamond ring worth thousands of dollars, but Mrs. Tempest's bunch of violets was the most expensive gift of all, it seemed to me.

It wasn't his fault. It took me a long time to grant this, and it wasn't until I had gone further and climbed steeper that I acknowledged it. Women appeared to think him their natural prey, and if temptation ever came and sat at a man's door, it did at Stephen Kirkland's! Those days he looked upon me as though I were his sister, and one night at dinner, when we had a distinguished French writer there, my husband said, in French, "*M. De Vaux, permettez moi de vous présenter à ma mère,*" and right then and there I learned how brilliant French people are, and how kindly

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

polite. The Frenchman bowed and smiled charmingly to me, and later said:

"Madame, I am inclined to wonder if you appreciated the compliment your husband unconsciously paid you a short time ago. Every perfect woman enfolds in her two qualities—that of the mother and that of the wife."

Mrs. Tempest was not at that dinner. She had just come back from Florida, where she had been with her husband almost since I had seen her first, and Mr. Tempest was very ill.

It turned out that I didn't need a great deal of social help. Mr. Van Buren knew something of etiquette, and, as Purchase said, "I did the best I could." Our house was so beautiful, our food so good, and Stephen so delightful, that things ran along and people liked to come.

It seemed as though we couldn't find time to go out ourselves—the people stayed late and came often. I learned a great deal about politics and about my country, and I must have made a fairly good background, for men talked round me, and brought the questions of the times to our music-room, where I sat every afternoon late, at tea. Pretty nearly every one worth knowing in Washington came and went—every one save my husband; he was never there. Except at luncheon, or when we had formal dinners ourselves, I never saw him. I was glad people came; they kept me from *feeling so keenly*, and I accepted every invitation my husband wished me to, and now and then I used to go up to my little room off my bedroom and shut the door and put my hands to my head, and say "*Hush! Hush!*" in hopes the whirlwind would die down, and let me hear some voice that would tell me what to do. Not about social

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

things—they seemed, after all, to take care of themselves—when you spend money like water and keep open house, and don't force your opinions on any one, it's easy enough to get along in the world—but *what I should do about my husband*—*that* was what I wanted some voice to tell me!

CHAPTER LIII



RS. TEMPEST began by being fond of me. I can never say she didn't like me, and she was my first intimate friend. Until she came I had hardly missed having any one, taken up as I was with Stephen; besides, women interest me less than men. I never know what a woman will do next, whereas, after a life with Stephen, I think I could pretty well prophesy what any half-way extraordinary man would do under unexpected circumstances. There must have been a lonely place, however; Mary Tempest found an empty one. I used to love her flying visits to me in the morning, when she made me sit down by her and hear her talk. And I took advice from her about my clothes. Fanny had given me up as a bad job from the first day, but Mary Tempest thought my style could be developed, and that I had one. She amused me and made me laugh. Her way of telling a story and of saying things was delightful. It wasn't so much "the regularity of her features, but the inspiration and brilliancy of her expression" that made her charming. That's what I heard my husband say about her once. I never asked her about entertaining, not because I was too proud, but I understood that I would never make a success in Washington in going any but my own way.

One reason Mary Tempest and I got on so well was be-

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

cause I left her alone, as I did my husband, and enjoyed her without bothering.

Mr. Tempest's condition didn't sadden her, and they wouldn't let her be with him the next season in the South, so she came back to Washington and opened her house, and there was a long session that year. For the first few weeks we saw each other all the time. Mary Tempest's experience was wide, and I can see her now, sitting in a comfortable chair in my little room, smoking a cigarette and looking at me through her lorgnon. One day she said:

"It's delicious, Esther, the way you say, 'Why, *Mary!*' to me. All your charm and innocence and unworldliness are comprised in those few words. *Do I shock you sometimes?*"

She had told me heaps of things about life and Europe, and all the scandals in Washington (and that took time). I said, "No, you haven't shocked me; real things don't do that."

"When I do," she told me, "say so." And in looking back I can't see now that she ever did. The anguish she gave me was of a very different kind.

There was a generosity about the way Mary Tempest looked at life and people; she was never critical or mean, though she was bitter—her life made her so in many ways, and she was ambitious. She brought me books to read, and when I told her I hadn't time to open them she scolded me.

"When a woman finds she hasn't time to read she had better dismiss one of her servants and do her own house-work; she'll discover whether she has any mind or not. Her longing for a book will be so great that she'll *make* time—I don't mean Miss Purchase, though," Mrs. Tempest said, for as we were speaking Purchase came in.

I had been in a fearful rush, for Fanny was coming back

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

in the middle of a gay week. And that night we had a dinner on of twenty. Mary Tempest had run in as she did, late, before luncheon. Miss Purchase came in, dressed up to kill. Everything she had on was new, and her wardrobe struck me all at once, from her bonnet, which was *simply fearful*, to the new, loud, cheap shoes that brought her creaking across the floor. She had a dotted veil over her eye-glasses, and her cheeks were scarlet. There, I thought, now she is going, and what on earth will become of me?

"Don't look scared," she said, quietly. "I'd like to see you alone, Mis' Kirkland, but that's as hard as it is to get the spots off your husband's clothes. I've come in to say you needn't call me Purchase any more."

I was so used to her queerness and her tenderness that I thought it was her way of asking me to call her Cornelia.

"I'm married," she said; "just now. We've just come in. You needn't bother about *him*—he's up-stairs getting off his boots; his feet hurt."

Mary Tempest didn't laugh, I was glad to see, for as I sat down at my desk I couldn't speak for fear I should scream with laughter and mortally offend my old servant.

"It's Van Buren," she said. "I thought you'd like him good as any, and if you're satisfied we can keep right on here."

We congratulated her. I kissed her, and she seemed calmly happy.

"'Twas the 'Miss,'" she informed us. "I actually couldn't bear it another minute. With all these titles and positions here, 'Miss' is too much!"

She had been my housekeeper and general manager, and "Mrs. Van Buren" would go down all right, but I should

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

have to get used to it, and I told her so. She had squeaked off to the door by this, and stopped there.

"No, Mis' Kirkland, you couldn't," she said, "and I couldn't either, from you. I'd be real glad if you'd call me Cornelia." And she went out.

So it was *that* hanging fire after all! I almost believe that she had gone and got married to bring it round! She had taken a violent dislike to Mrs. Tempest from the first, and was jealous of everybody who came near me, and could only be half-way decent to Fanny. She looked like a thunder-cloud whenever Mrs. Tempest was in her presence.

When she left, Mary said: "You draw the most antipodal creatures to you, Esther."

And I answered: "I wish I could draw Fanny to me."

"Nonsense!" my friend replied. "Let every pretty woman live her life, and don't make the mistake of thinking that because she's born in your family you have to lend her your conscience."

And I said: "I understand you perfectly, and I don't think so. I'm thinking of—her husband—the man."

And she answered, rather sharply: "I never knew you, my dear, when you weren't."

CHAPTER LIV



It was that night at dinner that I noticed it first. Though I had not seen my husband except at certain meals and when we went out together formally, I had hardly thought there was any reason for it but the engagements of his political life. The President was devoted to Stephen, and I took his absence for granted. They were agitating the tariff question, and Senator Bellars sat beside me for dinner. He and my husband were absorbed in the issue, and there had been a great deal of talk about the bribing of Congress by merchants and producers, and the day before Stephen had spoken, and Mrs. Tempest and I had gone together to hear him. This night at dinner she sat by my husband, and in a pause of conversation, after Stephen and his uncle had been talking heatedly together, she said something to him about the tariff and his opinions, and he answered her, and by the way they spoke—by what they said—*I knew*. She spoke as a woman speaks who has shared hours with a man, who has followed his aims, his work, his plans, his thoughts, for days, for weeks, closely. She spoke as a woman speaks only when she cares. Plate after plate of the long dinner passed me, and every bit I touched seemed turned to ice.

"You're not eating," Senator Bellars noticed, and I explained it by telling him I had a bad headache.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"You look it, my dear. Get away—I'll make your excuses."

Once up-stairs I saw only those two people as they sat at the other end of my table—my husband, his dark, eager face illumined, as it was these days, by his thoughts and his mind; and Mary Tempest, the wit and beauty of Washington, smiling on him. The two remained like that together before my mind's eyes *until I could see nothing else in the world*. Then and there I saw I should have a bad night, and took an antipyrine powder before I went to bed. Next morning, however, there they were again to greet me the moment I woke, and when Cornelia appeared with my breakfast (I had taken the habit from Fanny of eating breakfast in my room) I was glad *she* came in single, at any rate!

"Cornelia," I asked, "*why* did you get married?"

"Wall," she replied, "you work so queer with yours, I was just spoilin' to try *my way* on some one!"

And I couldn't help persisting: "What do you think is the matter with my way?"

"Why, you're too easy, Mis' Kirkland; you'd spoil a well-intentioned man."

I didn't wish her to go on, and she was far too discreet to breathe a word without encouragement. There had been a falling off this season in her devotion to my husband—not that she neglected him, but she allowed his man-servant to supersede her, and devoted herself to me. She told me the Senator had gone horseback riding. Mrs. Tempest was a famous horsewoman, and they had ridden together again to Chevy Chase. It was like an obsession in my brain, and I knew, too, now, *how I cared*. That morning before noon Fanny arrived. Cornelia Purchase Van Buren received her and told her I wouldn't be able to see her until

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

tea-time, that I had a headache now two days old. I might have added that my heart had ached on and off for six years—that was what was the matter with me!

There was a surprise on hand for Fanny, and I didn't care about seeing her before it arrived. I had an engagement with Mrs. Tempest for lunch, and to write the note to break my appointment was a physical pain for me. I had to go on in the old familiar way in order not to awaken her distrust; I didn't mean she should notice a difference in me. I kept my room all day, and at tea-time they let in Fanny and her children. She looked worn out—ten years older.

"Don't talk to me about American pleasure excursions!" she exclaimed, cross as two sticks. "The combination of American food and American weather is too much for any well-organized human being."

"Then you don't like the West any better than when you went out with us, Fanny?"

And she answered: "One doesn't *like* America, my dear Esther, one *endures* it. But you've taken first-rate care of the kiddies," and she regarded me with something like the look of a sister. "Who's been taking care of you?"

I told her of Cornelia's marriage, and she was awfully amused.

"You've been about a lot with Mrs. Tempest, haven't you?"

But I got her off that topic before my voice or my face could give me away. She was holding her littlest child, and I asked: "Is there anybody you'd especially like to see, Fanny?"

And she answered, crossly: "For Heaven's sake, don't have in a raft of people. There's only one person I can think of that I'd give a pin to see," and her face changed.

"Why? Who's that?"

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

And she replied, quietly: "Richard."

I took a telegram which had come to me that morning and handed it to her, and she exclaimed:

"Well, of all things!"

It said:

"Arrived. Will be with you to-morrow.

"RICHARD BAXFIELD."

And it was dated New York.

"But it's for *you*, Esther."

"In answer to one I sent," I told her. "I sent him one just after you'd gone West." I didn't care whether she was mad or not. "I cabled your husband I wanted to see him on important business."

"Well, I never heard of such a thing!" She stared at me. "Why, what *will* he think? What *did* you do it for? Whose business? I don't care to have you meddle in my affairs, Esther Carey."

And I smiled, for those were the words she had used when she was engaged to Charlie De Groot.

She put the baby down and got up off the bed.

"Well, you *are* queer," she murmured, but I could see that under all she was glad—glad. Her face lit up, and she walked over to the bureau, took up my manicure things and gazed at her nails, smiling. "You *are* queer," she murmured; but what she meant was, "I'm glad—I'm *glad*." In a second or two she said, from where she stood:

"You know Di Falleri, Esther? I got bored with him the first day of the trip. He made me tired, he was so vain and so sure. I wonder if you know what I mean? He took me for granted, and I expect he thought that since I had gone West with the others, as far as he was concerned *it meant*

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

everything. It made me perfectly furious—he is a sentimental snob, and I led him a dance, I promise you.”

She seemed delighted with her flirtation, and I could imagine how she had tortured the poor fellow.

“He left us in a rage at Denver, but joined us again, and, in short, *we came back as we went*.” She laughed heartily, and put down the nail-file and came back to me. “It was a really clever thing of you to send for Richard, Esther. I don’t mind a bit.”

Then I sat upright in bed and looked at her hard.

“Do you care for your husband, Fanny Baxfield?”

“Why, the idea! What a question, Esther Carey. I should think I did!”

“Very well, then, stick to him.” I didn’t finish, for she crinkled her brows a little and looked at me piercingly.

“Why—what—did—you—*really* send for him for?” she wondered. “Did you think I *didn’t* care for him, and that I had gone off for good—and you were jealous and unhappy and would console him?”

“Never mind,” I answered, coolly—“never mind. Only remember what I say, and don’t think that because a man’s married it doesn’t follow that every woman under creation won’t have her hack at him!”

She looked at me pityingly. “My *poor* Esther!” she murmured. “My husband is perfectly crazy about me. He always has been, and there’s really never been any other woman in his life but me.”

“Very well,” I answered, hard as nails, “see you keep him, that’s all! And keep him *up to that story*—if it’s what he’s told you!”

She went out of the room followed by the children, and I could have laughed out loud.

CHAPTER LV



R. BAXFIELD asked me at once why I had sent for him. We were at tea in the music-room the day he arrived, and he had run up to see his wife and the children, and then come down to me. He crossed the room with a quick, short step, and a walk that meant business; and he looked happy and successful and poised, and stouter and fatherly and husbandly. He came quickly to the sofa where I sat by the tea-table, gave me both hands, sat down by me, and said, in an undertone:

"I had been to the Parthenon with a Harvard chum of mine who had come over to Greece, and when I returned to the Embassy I found your despatch. It brought me a sight of Oretown—of the garden and the apple-trees. I sent for tickets at once for the first ship—you see, I am a chap to be counted on. What can I do for you?"

His face and his eyes were greatly changed. I saw Fanny there as plain as day—everywhere; he loved her, he *was crazy about her*, and I knew he was dying to get back upstairs.

"You're not sorry you've come?"

"Sorry? Lord, no!" he breathed. "Aren't the boys bruisers?"

I said to him: "I thought we all needed you. I can't claim anything but just that."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

Already he had forgotten the despatch, and everything except getting back up-stairs. He gulped his tea, and Mrs. Tempest came in then and I introduced them, and Mr. Baxfield left as soon as he decently could, going out as briskly as he came — big, strong, and devoted.

Mary Tempest asked me kindly about my headache. She had no idea that I noticed anything. She had just come from a *matinée*, and falling loosely in her jacket was the great bunch of violets she always wore. Her hat was a furry turban, and her hair came out from under it vigorous and shining, with a coppery glint, and her face was fresh and ardent. She talked to us delightfully about the play, and called me "Esther darling," and held her hand over mine a great deal of the time. When she was her most brilliant self my husband came in, to my surprise, for it was unusual to have him home for tea. At his entrance Mrs. Tempest withdrew her hand from mine, but the color in her cheeks didn't change—she only raised her head and her chin a little as a proud woman might do when the man of all men came in.

My husband drew up a chair and sat opposite us, and then the two shook hands, and though they were clever, worldly people they couldn't help it, *their eyes looked*—and I saw. Stephen began to tell her about a meeting just held in his committee-room on the formation of a mining bill Nevada was trying to pass, but they hadn't been able to get a quorum. Neither thought that I had the least idea of what was between them; perhaps neither of them cared. They did not speak or turn to me, and after a little I went through into the drawing-room. In the window by the piano there were two people—Fanny and her husband. She was talking fast, and laughing, telling him things—as one does; and he had both his arms about her waist.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

I couldn't pass them—I preferred, even, to recross the music-room; and when I went back over the threshold and looked at the other two, Stephen was talking eagerly to Mrs. Tempest, telling her things—as one does; and she was listening eagerly.

I went up-stairs—I thought I'd dictate some notes to Van Buren; and when I reached my little room I heard voices there. The door was half-way open, and I could see Cornelia standing by her husband at my desk—she was laying down the law, there wasn't a doubt about it—and Van Buren had a dreamy, resigned look, and she was saying things; he seemed to like them.

I went on to my bedroom, got my hat and coat and fur and gloves, and started out for a long walk. Nobody needed me, and the couples were pretty well filled out.

CHAPTER LVI



RICHARD BAXFIELD had to return to Greece almost immediately, and it was a relief to me when the Baxfields were gone. There were more rooms I could think in and wonder in, and I missed no one. Every time I was invited, I went to dinner and to lunch, and all the time I was studying out, thinking, wondering, planning, trying to understand and to be led.

Mrs. Tempest was asked everywhere that we were, and Senator Kirkland took her in to dinner nearly every time. I couldn't make out what was generally known, and I didn't notice whether people were pitying or ignoring me. Little by little, though as far as I know I never changed, Mary Tempest didn't come to see me so often, and I had not been in the habit of calling at her house much, and by-and-by she ceased to come at all.

Stephen had no idea how he ignored me, I am sure, but at one time he didn't address a word to me for three days; at the end of the third I was sitting sewing in my little room, and the windows were open, and I had on a thin dress, a pretty one, with a long blue sash, when my husband came in and threw himself down in a big chair.

"How pleasant it is here," he said, "and what a picture of domestic industry you are, my dear girl."

He was nervous and strained, and leaned his head on his

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

hand and stared at me from under the shield of his fingers.

There had been a bit of news in the evening papers, and the *Post* lay there. I had been reading, and I knew that my husband came in to me at this hour because he had missed an appointment with Mrs. Tempest, and that he was annoyed and unhappy.

"You've seen, Stephen, that Mr. Tempest is dead?" I asked him.

"God bless my soul!" he exclaimed, "no, I haven't. Is it in the paper?" And he took the *Post*.

He couldn't control all his emotion, and when he spoke again his voice had a strained sound, as though he were keeping back the natural ring of it. There was not a grain of hypocrisy in Stephen, and he didn't even know how to protect me. He didn't refer to the subject of Mr. Tempest, but began to speak about the tariff bill, and said he had a close decision before him; and when he left the room it was to go to her, I knew. He told me to excuse him for dinner, that he couldn't be at home, and I knew that I should have to sit through another long function, conscious all the while that the one word in Washington was that "Mrs. Tempest was free."

I couldn't write her—and I didn't. She was away for a fortnight, and during the first few days after she came back I passed her in the street, in her coupé, her black veil thrown back from her face—not the face of a woman in sorrow—and in her dress was a great bunch of violets.

Mrs. Cornelia Purchase Van Buren acted very strangely those days. She avoided me, and I felt that the whole world had turned a blank to me, and the best thing for me

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

was to get out of where I happened to be, at any rate; as wives are sometimes, I was surely *de trop*.

Mrs. Van Buren came into my little room and shut the door. Whenever she talked to me, though I was a Senator's wife and she an upper servant, she always talked in a familiar, cross way that certain people have who are fond of you.

"I can't keep in another minute, Mis' Kirkland. What air you goin' to do?" She was trembling and excited as I had never seen her.

"About what, Cornelia?"

"Why, about what Washington and the papers and *Town Topics* and everybody gasses about except yourself—"

"Go back to your room!" I ordered. I was furious; anger rose at her words. No one had ever breathed a word of any kind to me before.

She gasped out: "Go to my room? Lands! I've been there, and not seen any real joy in it, *he* can tell you. I've been just spoilin' to bust out to the Senator, and if you don't, I *will*!"

She was more tragic than I could have been, and her trembling lips and her working hands were so loyal to me!

"You may go," I said; "you and your husband will find another place at once."

My check-book was on the table, and I opened it. Her cheeks were red as fire and her eyes flashed behind her shining glasses, and she cried, wildly:

"Oh, I'll go fast enough, sence you turn me out. But let me tell you that you're a fool, Mis' Kirkland; he'd orter been horsewhipped long ago, if he *is* a genius. My husband will go, too." She turned in her stiff, rigid way, and got as far as the door.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"Wait until I've made out your check," I commanded. "I don't wish to see you again." My hand trembled as I wrote, and when the slip was made out and the book closed and the pen put up, Cornelia stalked back to me, and before I could stop her was down on her knees, weeping violently, as only those hard, strained natures can weep. She kissed my hands and told me she "wouldn't go, not if I was to get the President here to turn her out."

"I jest lost holt," she said. "I couldn't bear it, with her husband's dying and leaving the coast clear. Don't blame *him*," she urged (and meant poor, meek Van Buren); "*he* don't know anything about it, not a mite; he's as innocent as the angels."

I was afraid she would have hysterics, and I gave her my handkerchief to wipe her tears. When I had calmed her down and torn up the check at her entreaty, she rose and announced to me:

"Say, I might as well tell you, I'm going to have a baby. I suppose you thought I was too old. Well, I don't seem to be; and I'm going to call it for you, *even if it's a boy*; I don't keer—we'll bring it up together."

Under the circumstances I forgave her, and when she went out finally I felt less alone.

My part the next few days grew less easy to assume. There were many ways in which Stephen seemed to need me still. He was absorbed in the tariff problem with the others, and men went nearly crazy over it in the Senate, and they sat all day and away into the night. My husband grew more and more liberal in his views, and appeared, little by little, to be fired by an idealism of which he had given no indication before. He read an extraordinary amount during the hours when he should have been asleep. Our rooms

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

adjoined, and I could hear him walking the floor and talking aloud. He gave his brain no rest. One night, at half-past three, he came into my room, and said:

"I can't sleep, Esther." He had a book open in his hand. He lit the lamp at my side and drew up a chair, and when he had made himself comfortable he said: "Listen to this subtle, far-reaching gospel. What a horror it makes the close greed of a single nation seem; America with its avaricious doors closed against the trade of the world!"

And he read aloud to me something from Adam Smith. His voice was wonderful, and his face, too. As I lay there listening I had my clearest sight of my husband's idealism and his poetry of mind. Over and over again as he read, and when he interrupted himself to speak, I thought to myself with a pang: "I ought to have let him write his book, and not have urged him to accept the nomination for Governor of Nevada!"

"Are you asleep?" he asked me, suddenly, with so much pain in his voice that I was grateful to be able to say:

"Heavens! Not when there's a thing like *that* to listen to!"

He laid his book down open on his knee and lit a fresh cigar, smiling through the smoke at his new ideas.

"This new point of view of mine," he murmured, "will cost me my seat in the United States Senate." Then he quoted in Greek or Latin something about man's fears. "Esther, I shall go in for free trade," he said, and as I answered, "I should think you would, Stephen!" he lifted his eyebrows, and asked, sharply, "Why do you think so?" and I answered, "Why, because it's right, isn't it?"

"You don't remind me of what my constituents will say," he went on, looking at me curiously, "and my uncle. You

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

don't tell me the face of the whole country will be turned against me, and that I am preparing to block myself out of American political history. You don't tell me this, or that I am a romantic fool!"

And by his accent and his expression I understood that *she* had reminded him of just these things.

He touched the book he held, and went on:

"This has interested you, Esther?" And I told him that I thought it was perfectly beautiful; and he asked me not to mention his sentiments or anything he had said to me, as outwardly he had taken no decided stand.

"I am feeling my way, my dear Esther, and I begin to find that for a man like me the Senate is a shell."

He went to his own room, the book under his arm and his cigar smoke heavy on the air. I liked it, and went to sleep drinking in the fragrance.

In an hour he was back again. I saw he couldn't sleep, and he remained talking with me for a couple of hours.

"I am passing through a crisis, Esther—mental and spiritual, if you like. Sleep and food are as though they were not; but now that I speak of food, I see that I *am* fiendishly hungry! What *do* you think you could find me?"

I went down-stairs and managed to get him a little luncheon; it took time, and when I came up he was lying on my bed sound asleep, the light full in his eyes. I made it dark and covered him as well as I could, and went myself to his room.

For a week neither of us slept between two and four, and there was something on every night in the way of dinners. I often went alone, as the tariff discussion kept my husband so closely at the Capitol, and when he was not with his party he was with Mrs. Tempest. He grew more rest-

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

less, more nervous, and what he didn't prepare in his committee-rooms he prepared at my bedside. I had the feeling that *she* was against his new point of view, and Stephen was so honest and so clear in his own mind that I was sure nothing would alter him or affect him, and I began to understand that he found it sympathetic to carve out his dreams by my side.

CHAPTER LVII



WAS sitting dictating a lot of letters to Van Buren when Senator Bellars sent up word to ask if he could see me, and although his visits were no surprise as a rule, this one was unexpected, for he had been seriously ill, and no one had bothered him much about politics. This sudden call made me think back to Brackettsville, when the servant had fetched me up his card the first day in her soapy fingers. Van Buren with my letters and his note-book slipped out in his quiet way as Senator Bellars came in. He was seventy-two then, and a magnificent old man—splendid white hair, thick as a bush, and keen eyes hiding behind shaggy brows. He kissed me; he often did; he was tender with me, and I could count the times tenderness had flown in at my windows. He had been housed for six weeks and we had seen him there, but politics had not been mentioned to him—his doctors had forbidden it.

“Now tell me,” he said, sharply, “what the *deuce* does this mean about Stephen?”

“He’s at the Capitol now,” I answered; “he didn’t have any idea you would be out to-day.”

“He’s making a fool of himself, Esther. God alone knows what materials have gone toward constructing that mercurial, ill-balanced, talented mind. As far as I can see, Stephen is now on the road to political ruin as fast as he

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

can go. Why, he has lost the sense and spirit of the country! I really believe he is going insane. I understand that he caught the Vice-President's eye long enough to-day to give vent to some lunatic fanciful ideas that were almost the heralds of a *free-trade* polemic. He has a disorganized mind, my dear child. You'll laugh at me if I say that your husband is *going to stand for free trade* at this moment of the country's policy."

Stephen's uncle waited a minute, and I *didn't* laugh.

"You don't realize, of course, what it means, Esther. He will ruin himself with his party."

I interrupted him to say that whatever Stephen did he was sincere, and the Senator repeated, scornfully:

"*Sincere?* He's a sentimentalist and a dreamer. I'm beginning to think he is out of his career here. Sentimentality doesn't go in politics or in anything else."

I said that Stephen wasn't pledged to any tariff platform for his State, and his uncle returned:

"No, not pledged; the industries of Nevada aren't those that will make the State a heavy sufferer by any tariff bill. He doesn't realize that he is not an individual, but a party. High tariff is an unwritten law of the times, and every man's duty is to promote it."

I said: "I think Nevada leaves things pretty much in Stephen's hands; they worship him."

Senator Bellars changed his position on the sofa, and turned round to me, and exclaimed: "You don't seem to realize, my dear woman, that he is going to ruin himself."

I remember very well what my husband had said years ago about his uncle's timidity in questions at issue:

"Everything he does is in the line of sentimental emotionalism, egoism, and—"

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

I was knitting. I had taken up my work when Van Buren went out; it was a white thing and small. I was helping Cornelia.

"Uncle," I said, "I don't believe you care for Stephen."

Senator Bellars pulled at his mustache and snorted:

"Nonsense!"

"You don't love him, anyway."

He growled again. "I love *you*, Esther Kirkland," he nodded his gray head, "*dearly*, and I have had an old-fashioned anger and fury on me for some time." His eyes were on my work; it had the little sleeves in.

"Don't ask me what I'm making," I told him, quickly, before he could do so. "It's for a friend."

"Humph!" he grunted, got out his cigars, cut one, and lit it. "I've come purposely to talk to you alone on this subject." He leaned forward eagerly. "You must get Steve out of this state of mind. Go at this, Esther, as you've gone at everything else, and save your husband." He waited a moment and stopped, and I knew what he thought; it was strange to see it in the face of another person, and it made me catch my breath. *I knew that he thought suddenly—perhaps Esther hasn't any influence with him at all!*

I didn't say anything. I determined that he should do all the talking, and I counted aloud as I turned the neck of the jacket.

His eyes left my face as he said, slowly:

"Stephen, I believe, would never have arrived at this position but for some outside influence. 'Cherchez la femme—'" He waited. "I speak to you," he went on, slowly, "as I would speak to his friend—his sister—his mother."

I put Cornelia's baby's jacket down and I looked at him.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"Speak to me as you would speak to Stephen's wife, uncle; that is what I am, after all."

Looking at the end of his cigar, he answered, shortly:

"Well, then, I *can't* speak to you at all." And his brows gathered and darkened as if his face was a glass that reflected a storm.

"Then she'll speak to you, uncle. You mean Mrs. Tempest has influenced Stephen to change his party and his views and his platform—to go on more boldly in his way of thinking than he would otherwise have dared to do?"

He replied, slowly: "Yes: since you are so generous as to put the thing in words—yes."

"Well, then," I said, "I think she is to be admired."

He started violently. "God bless my soul!" he cried, "are you entirely mad?"

"I mean, uncle, that to do such things is what a woman is good for—to urge a man on, to help him to be big enough to dare, in spite of advantage and policy, and to speak out what he thinks, to change his views whenever he thinks he ought to; to change his career if he likes, if he is sure it's what he wants—to go back and forth until he finds the right place. If Mrs. Tempest has done this for Stephen, if she *is* doing it, why, she's a good influence."

The Senator could hardly sit still. He was slapping his knee. "Why, you're perfectly crazy!" he cried. "You see your husband ruining himself with his party—ruining himself with—" He got up.

And I said: "Wait until you see Stephen; you haven't heard his side. Wait." And he caught at this eagerly.

"I only hope he has a side. I hope he is only going through a phase; but his fantastic mind is not to be relied upon."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

He came back to me, for he had been walking around in his old excited way, weak as he was, and he sat down again. "You astound me! I don't know what you're made of—what you mean!" He cleared his throat. "You refer to the influence of another woman in your husband's life—of, as you call it, her 'urging him on'; you speak of her with a calmness, a tranquillity—" He paused.

"How would you have me speak?"

And he burst out: "You astound me! When a woman loves a man, if she *does* love him, she doesn't admit or tolerate the presence in his life of another woman."

"What does she do?" And as he stared at me I answered for myself: "I've been wondering. She makes scenes and cries, but I really can't see that that does much good; she keeps him awake at night and helps the scandal along, and then she goes away or she sends him away—"

He interrupted me. "Why, you speak as though you accepted the fact *for* a fact—that Stephen—" Watching my face intently, he emphasized, slowly: "You compliment this woman on her influence over your husband—I don't understand you. You asked me if *I* loved Stephen—"

I interrupted him. "If he owes his stimulus to a companionship which, in spite of policy and interest, makes him hold his own views—if he owes this to Mrs. Tempest, she has cause to be proud of him. But, uncle, I don't think it's the case."

And my husband's uncle caught quickly at this, and said: "You think, then, that he has nothing but his own dreamer's brain to aid his folly?"

And I answered: "I think Stephen is working out his destiny without Mrs. Tempest's intellectual help. You don't know, perhaps, that, although her husband was a low-

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

tariff man, *she* is a high-tariff advocate, and I don't believe that she has anything to do with Stephen's state of mind."

Senator Bellars thought for a few moments, then he said: "I presented her to you. You would have met her anyway, but I gave you to her." He hesitated, and looked at me with deep affection. "I'm not speaking to his sister or his friend?" he questioned.

And I replied: "No; only to his wife."

He put his arm around me and drew me to him and kissed me on the hair, and I leaned my head against his breast as though he had been my father. After a little while I couldn't help thinking, for I was practical, "If he knew how I felt about free trade he wouldn't want me here," so I sat up and wiped my eyes.

CHAPTER LVIII



THE strain of the times during the tariff debate everybody knows, but I don't think Stephen would have been so nervous and worn out if it hadn't been that he was going through a great change more vital than the question at issue. Much of the time he seemed to me like a thirsty man seeking for a pool of water to quench him, and I used to wish with all my heart that he could find something which would bring him peace, no matter what it might be.

One day, when I knew that the session had closed and that the Capitol was deserted, he didn't come home to dinner and never sent me any word. I had a dinner at the house myself, and when I went up-stairs at eleven-thirty to my room I found my husband there. He had come in early, and had ordered his table and papers put by my bed, and there he sat working and writing. I undressed in the little room, and, finally, when he called me, I went to bed and fell off asleep, and he wrote on. When, much later, I wakened he was sitting there pale and absorbed, and I got up and made him some hot clam broth over a lamp, for since his midnight watches I had kept something ready. Then, after he had begun his work again, I fell asleep for good, and when I waked at seven he was gone. He hadn't been to bed at all that night, but bathed and dressed and went horseback riding in the Circle with her.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

I never saw him at all that day except in the afternoon, when I went up into the Senate and sat in the part of the Members' Gallery where there was always a place for me. Mrs. Tempest was also in one of the galleries, in light mourning, with violets. She was pale, and looked strained and beautiful. It wasn't needful for me to see her or her me. When Stephen came in I didn't care to look at anything else, for he sat in his chair before his desk, leaning his head on his hand, and I couldn't but think how unlike the rest he was—he looked so young among them,—so slender, and the hand holding his cheek was the hand of a poet, and not a statesman's hand. There was a stupid altercation on between Senator A—— and Senator B——, and finally—I could tell he had been waiting for it—Stephen caught the Vice-President's eye and made his sign, and rose.

There was a stir. He didn't say much, but he said it swiftly, and clearly he attracted the attention, and it was just following on, still shielded and subtle and hidden, a sort of levelling of mountains, a sort of challenging of different ways and means. He almost seemed to ignore the personalities and powers around him—he was making a big preparation for something to come, and I understood and wondered if his uncle did. I glanced over at the other woman, who sat so beautiful and pale and proud; she was ambitious for my husband, and she was troubled. And I was ambitious for him, and I was glad!

When we went out into the rotunda I found myself side by side with Mary Tempest, and knew I should have to speak. My limbs seemed encased in ice, with a fire burning under the cold. She spoke first—I was grateful to her. She asked me the name of the Senator replacing the

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

Senator from Missouri, who had died, and I told her. She never met my eyes; and as though he were searching for one of us, at any rate, my husband, with his uncle, came out. Before they reached us they stopped, and Stephen went back to his committee-room and Mr. Bellars joined us. He asked us both if we were dining at the White House, and when we said yes his voice was cold, and he suggested walking home with me; and he bowed to Mrs. Tempest as though she were a queen to whom he wouldn't be a subject for anything, and he put his arm through mine as though I belonged to him, and we marched away!

My husband didn't come in that afternoon, nor in time for dinner, and the fact that we were to dine at the Executive Mansion troubled me for his negligence. I didn't know what to make of it, for this was something he would not have done, I felt sure, under any ordinary circumstances. I sent word to say that we were detained by illness—a hurried note; and coming as it did with such rudeness on the top of Stephen's new, exaggerated policy—well, I didn't care! I only wondered *where* he could be.

With her, of course. Perhaps the crisis had come—and without any move on my part they had gone together. I didn't send word to his uncle—I decided to wait. Cornelia was away for a month at the sea, fairly pushed out of the house by my entreaties. I had daily letters from her, wails of homesickness. I sat down-stairs, dressed as I was for dinner, and waited for what I did not know. And at midnight Senator Bellars himself stopped in on the way home.

"How is Stephen?" he asked. "Is he really very ill? What are you doing down here?"

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

I asked who was there.

And he answered: "Everybody but Mrs. Tempest; it seems she had a sudden indisposition, too."

He waited, staring at me from under his shaggy brows, and as he did so an anger, sharp, furious, loyal, came over my anguish, and I said:

"I guess Stephen will be all right to-morrow; he's on a dreadful strain."

Senator Bellars said nothing more, just stayed a second, and if he wondered at my sitting up there dressed in my dinner-dress, waiting, he didn't remark it.

It was explained, then: they were both absent, it would be a scandal, and coming on the end of his speech—absent from the President's dinner. Somehow the room where he had sat writing till morning so many times seemed impossible for me to seek. And in my little boudoir I took off my handsome dress and let it fall; I had told the colored maid who served me in Cornelia's place to go to bed. But I had to fetch my night things at length, and I opened the door into my bedroom.

Stephen was standing there rigid, like a frozen man, and white as the risen dead. I saw there was something wrong; he stared beyond me out of his great dark eyes. I had the feeling that if I spoke to him suddenly I would break him as though he were a reed, so I went over and quietly put my arm round his shoulders, and said:

"Stephen!"

He shuddered, as though he were under a spell which I had really broken, and clung to the bed's foot as if it were to save him from destruction.

"What is it, Stephen? What is it? Can't you speak to me? Lean on me."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"Wait, wait," he said, with effort, speaking in a small, high voice, "don't ask me any questions. Let me return slowly to life, my dear girl." He found he could stand without the bed's support, and let go. Then I led him gently to a chair, where he sat down. I couldn't give him any stimulants, but as soon as I could I warmed him some hot bouillon, and he went on in the same queer voice, staring at me and through me:

"I have just passed through the most terrible experience of my life, Esther. After leaving you and my uncle this afternoon I went to my committee-room, and until this moment, when you said my name, I have had no consciousness—I don't know where I've been, or what has happened, or how I got here. Don't be so alarmed"—he smiled—"it's all over; nothing but brain-fag—not unique, by any means. I expect I must have remained in the Capitol until late, and then, without volition, walked home and let myself in with my latch-key, and no one saw me; but I came here—" He repeated the word gently, and smiled, and looked around at my room. Then he drew a long sigh and covered his face with his hands. He wouldn't hear of my calling any one or sending for a doctor, and I felt, myself, as if I couldn't bear any one to come in upon him so. I helped him undress, and when he was ready he turned toward my bed, and I led him there, and when I had made him comfortable and warm he turned over on his arm and fell asleep like a boy thoroughly tired out.

I put on my dressing-gown and waited with the light turned low, as a mother might. He had sat writing there at this table, in this chair, many hours, and I couldn't but wonder if every man in the nation worked as he did—I supposed they did, but it seemed to me that his was a

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

especially fine kind of labor; and I wound up with thinking that I had told the truth to his uncle and to the President, and whatever Mrs. Tempest's indisposition might have been, Stephen's was real, and he was safe at home.

CHAPTER LIX



THE following day was the last sitting of Congress, and I sat in the gallery waiting to hear, if my husband should speak. He had slept late and I gave him his breakfast in bed; then he had risen and dressed, and gone to the Capitol, assuring me he was all right and not to worry. I didn't worry, even when I saw how pale he was, for he was entirely composed. Mrs. Tempest was in her place as well. I afterward knew that she had been in his committee-room to see him before he went into the Senate-room.

When Stephen rose there was a perfect hubbub against letting him speak. It was a long time before they would let him make himself heard, and twice he was refused permission. Anybody who wants to read that speech on free trade by Senator Kirkland, lanced right in the middle of the hottest high-tariff war that has ever been in our country—anybody who wants to may get it from the Congressional Library. I thought it was perfectly beautiful. There wasn't a sound after the first murmur, when he came so evidently out for free trade, by his stand, as far as anybody could prophesy, damning his chances in his State for any further recognition. It seemed, of course, that he handed in his resignation, that he stepped out of politics. His charm was so great, his voice and his

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

words so simple, so convincing, that even his enemies were obliged to listen as if they were bewitched. It was the longest speech of the afternoon, and I watched Senator Bellars as he sat there, his elbows on his desk, his head in his hands, and his eyes on Stephen. He just thought that, talented as he was, my husband was insane.

He couldn't but admire him.

When Stephen had finished and sat down, the opponent party broke forth against him in the speech of Senator Hendricks, and it was like turning a battering-ram on a flag fluttering in the breeze. I couldn't but feel it wouldn't have reached him anywhere.

When I went out later I saw Mr. Collins coming toward me, and as he shook hands, he said: "I have never heard such an appeal to the ideal!" By his face and his words, though he was awfully excited, I couldn't tell what he meant or how he felt. And I went home quickly, alone, through the streets and up to my little room, and threw off my things. It was very warm, late as it was in the evening, and I thought that the room smelled unusually sweet: on my table was a florist's box addressed to me. It was a great bunch of violets. It gave me a sudden feeling of sickness—a faintness. Those flowers meant just one thing to me. At first I thought *she* must have sent them, and when I saw my husband's card, I decided they had come to me by mistake. I couldn't believe that he would transfer that special order to me. They lay there, lovely and dark and grateful, rare for the season of summer, and as I sat there fanning I got used to them and to their smell. In a little while my husband came in.

"Esther, can you get ready to start for Nevada to-night? I'm going out as fast as I can. Collins is coming with

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

us. I want to sink in the old hole, Esther. I want to offer my body up to the arrows."

It was on my tongue to say, "But you don't want *me*, do you?" But the fact that he had asked me was enough, and the only thing that hurt me in leaving—for I wanted to go—was leaving Cornelia Van Buren.

We got off in two hours' time, flying westward, and my husband was as gay as a boy, and perfectly delighted to be gone. When we were sitting out in the observation-car, Stephen said to me:

"Did you get those flowers from Pearson's this afternoon?"

"Yes, some violets came."

"Well?" He waited.

I didn't know what to say—they were personal, associated, thrilling to me, and sad. But I could see that he didn't feel it so at all, that he just sent them because *they were violets*, and nothing more. I wondered what on earth they could ever have meant to him, month after month, on the breast of the other woman. What could they have signified that he could hand them now so simply to his wife? And I thought to myself: "I believe there's some deeper reason than I know or see, for he is so clever and so full of ideas."

"Did you want me to wear them, Stephen?" I asked him, and he smoked a few moments, and then answered:

"Why, I wanted you to do with them whatever pleased you, my dear girl."

"I put them in water in my room, on your table, where you wrote your beautiful speech."

It was a fine night, and the car went swiftly through it, and I couldn't see him in the dark, out of which he said to me:

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"I'm glad you liked my speech. Thank you for telling me. I've been waiting for you to speak of it."

And somehow, when he said this, I realized that I hadn't mentioned a word to him about his speech in the hurry and the rush of getting away, of giving directions and orders, and of the excitement in feeling that he was going with me—going alone with me and far away.

CHAPTER LX



WE had decided, Mr. Collins and I, that not one word of politics was to be mentioned between us on the way out. Mr. Collins told me that he had personally telegraphed, with the reporters, my husband's speech to Carson City. Going westward we passed into the yellowy harvest. Mr. Collins and my husband were company for each other. I was glad to be alone, for I was thinking and planning, and those days on the cars I had time to set things in order as I had not been able to do in Washington, when things were going on around me all the time, and I couldn't get near to them without being hurt. Stephen had been going on, going on, these years at a great pace; from a worthless citizen he had climbed to be Governor of the State, and Senator, and I began to see that in my way I had gone along too.

Before we reached —, where you make the change for Carson City, Mr. Collins came to me and asked me to talk with him for a few seconds.

"I shall want your help, Mrs. Kirkland. I am keeping his telegrams from him; he has an idea he won't be able to bear this reception and what he will have to meet. He intends, he tells me, laying down political life. If things are as bad as he thinks, I am inclined to believe it would be better that he should do so."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

That afternoon my husband said to me: "You remember the week of the election at Carson City, Esther; there in that hotel, to please you, I took up politics. Now I have been coward enough to fetch you back here to stand by me while I lay them down. I couldn't face what I am going through without you, Esther."

And I said: "Perhaps they won't let you give it up."

And he retorted: "Why, don't you know what we are going to see? I can only say to you what I would not say to any one else in the world: the temptation to me to address the United States Senate from the chair I sat in was too strong. I have acted like an apostle, not like a public servant, and I am going to pay for it now."

I asked him, quickly: "Stephen, do you regret it?"

He smiled at me and said: "Why, it's a wonderful smiting off of the chains to me." And he asked me eagerly, as a boy might ask for a lost treasure: "Esther, you didn't throw away *Lucia di Siena*, did you? You couldn't remember what you did with that old manuscript, could you?"

And as I didn't answer he was too kind to make me feel badly, but I saw his face fall terribly. He gave a long sigh, and said: "Never mind, never mind."

I understood him; it was the waking again of the old, old talent, the real one, the thing hid under the napkin, the real thing, the genius of him. It was getting too alive to be killed by his friends and his wife; I began to see the light of it on his brow and in his eyes.

I can't remember all he said that day about his schemes and his new ideas and his new ideals, and the figures of speech he used about art and literature, and the things he said about materialism dwarfing the soul. . . . He said he was

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

a writer born, over and over again, and that he would turn like a thirsty deer to a stream and steep himself in the joy of creation, and that he would write a great book. As he said this I remembered how he had seemed to me in Washington like a parched creature longing for the source. And yet I couldn't get my mind on what he was saying—it seemed too far away.

It was late summer, and the plains were ripe; before we passed into the sterile State the very land seemed aching with wheat and green corn. Our train was poor; we stopped everywhere, and when we crossed into Nevada people crowded down to the station, to the junctions, and I saw them, and the freight loading and unloading, as in a dream. It seemed to me to be a thousand years since we'd gone East from Nevada, yet it was only three years, and the woman coming back there in that train, sitting alone—Mr. Collins and Stephen were ahead in a seat—was a different woman from the one who had gone East with Senator Kirkland, and I began to see how very different indeed she was! That woman was an animated Duty, and the one who was coming West was nothing but a woman. And in the other crisis I hadn't known what to do, and yet the right thing to do came easy. It was different now. I knew what to do, and yet I didn't believe I would have the courage. I didn't look at Stephen in the same old way, and I couldn't look at him sitting there smiling and gesturing with his thin, dark hands without a thrill at my heart, and that and a determination pushed me on to a selfhood of which I was ignorant. It was like a goad of thorns.

We stopped, it seemed for years, at a small mid-country station called Nutfield, though the only fields were the

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

prairies lying under a pale, tender sky. Finally Mr. Collins left us to see what was the matter, and when he returned he told us that we'd have to go to Oretown that night and put up there, for there was an obstacle on the main line to Carson City, and the train only went as far as Oretown.

Stephen said: "Well, one place is as good as another for them to begin in," and I saw that he was horribly nervous and tired. He asked Mr. Collins why he hadn't given him the papers, and how it happened no wires had been received. And Mr. Collins told Stephen there was nothing for him, that he had asked along the line.

When we got out at the Junction at eight o'clock there wasn't a soul in sight, and his relief was keen. He told me afterward that he had expected to be greeted by hisses, and that the people, like a band of roughs, were going to line up and throw mud at him, or something to that effect!

The streets were empty, and old Joe Bangs's buckboard was there to carry us over town. The only thing we noticed in the way of a demonstration was that Joe's horse had an American flag over his ear. We rattled away through the thick road in the late summer twilight, and, as far as I was concerned, I had the biggest feeling of rest that I'd known yet in going back to a place. It seemed to me like I was going home. Firesides had been temporary in my history, and there had always been so many people at them that *my* corner had been out of the glow. My husband didn't even jolly old Joe—he was silent. His career had begun here, and it was going to end here, as far as he knew, in disgrace. The *Cry* must have had his speech out days ago, and little Oretown was as still as death when we drove into it; the population had

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

gone on somewhere. There were only a few stragglers in the streets when we passed First Hotel; there wasn't a man sitting up with his feet on the rail spitting tobacco. I heard my husband ask:

"What's struck the town, Joe? The cholera?"

And Joe murmured that the town had gone to Carson City for the fair.

Mr. Collins said: "The traffic has been so heavy on the branch that the trains have stacked up."

As we drove past First my husband touched Joe on the shoulder. "Hold up here."

But Mr. Collins said: "No, Kirkland, it seems that the old house has been fixed for you for the night. Some chap got wind that Mrs. Kirkland was coming, and they've given you a housewarming."

It seemed to beam upon us from the windows and doors. There wasn't a soul to greet us, but it stood smiling broadly. It had been empty for a year, since the last tenant left; we had been renting it furnished all along.

Stephen took everything quietly, and in the kitchen the wife of First Hotel's proprietor was there with a colored girl, getting supper. I couldn't wait to get up-stairs.

The sun had gone down, and I threw the windows of the west room open and looked out on the plain, where a double track of glistening rails shot out and away, and the stars were shining. The air smelled sweet, and my heart felt as if it would burst in my breast. They had fixed the rooms next for Stephen and Mr. Collins, and on my bureau was a bunch of white phlox from Richard Baxfield's garden gone to seed.

Stephen continued absorbed and subdued. Mr. Collins, however, was in great spirits and jollied him up. We were

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

all glad to go to our rooms early, and on in the night, when a shutter banged and blew, for the wind rose, I went into Stephen's room, and his window was wide open and the air blowing on him. It was moonlight, and from his room you could see the garden, dark and deserted. Fanny's husband and the past entirely faded away, and only this moment was real to me. Fast as things had gone, and big as they had been, nothing had been quite real in my life until these last few months!

I closed the blinds. My husband was sleeping profoundly, his head on his arm, and it was wonderful to think how that single man had stood up there with a *country* against him and talked about "his ideal." Whether they liked the pulse or not, it certainly had beaten for a moment through the Senate. The quiet of Oretown, and its desolation, seemed to me like a kindness of fate, to let him rest here and take a breath before the storm.

We took the first train out next day, and there was no station between Carson City and Oretown except the Junction, in the heart of the plains. We were five hours late, of course, on the short run, and it was night before we crawled into Carson City station.

The first thing I heard as our train ran in was a clash of music and the roar and cries of voices. The music broke suddenly upon us, the cries were so loud and shaking, it was like a flood that turned its tides upon us and shook us to our foundations. The sea-like sound and the hurricane came surging to our car, and the first thing I knew the windows were full of faces and the car filled up, and people were carrying banners and wore rosettes on their coats. There was something terrible about it and over-

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

powering. We had the car to ourselves, and Stephen had been sitting alone near the end. I saw him rise and stand . . . the people surged around him, and I saw him no more.

Seth Collins and Colonel Amos Babcock, president of the Carson City Central Bank, were at my side, and Mr. Collins said:

"They've got him, Mrs. Kirkland; you'll have to give him up to them; he belongs to Nevada! *We'll* look out for you."

One either side of me they led me through the crowd, through the station, gleaming with lights and resounding with shouts. There was a landau decorated with flags, and flowers waving, and we made our way through the living sea and I was put into the carriage, and they got in after me.

"Look! look!" Colonel Babcock told me; "they're carrying him on their shoulders! Can you see him? There, under the banner, by that group of torches!"

There was a big square of lights, and the faces were lit up by the flame. I could see my husband high on their shoulders; his head was bare, and he was speaking. Then he disappeared with the torches and the lights and the murmurs and the cries, and all closed in, and above it I heard the ringing of the church-bells.

Colonel Babcock said: "You're not frightened, are you, Mrs. Kirkland?"

I shook my head, and Mr. Collins said:

"Mrs. Kirkland isn't the kind to be frightened, Colonel." And he told me that all along the journey he had known what the sentiment was. "And I won't say," he laughed, "that perhaps it didn't get its start right from Washington. I won't say that there hasn't been a sort of train being

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

laid by us fellows ever since your husband became so poetical."

We passed under the banners and arches of flags, and by the side of our carriage the band walked, playing "Marching Through Georgia."

I asked Colonel Babcock: "Has Nevada gone free trade with Stephen?"

And he exclaimed: "Free trade, my dear lady! I don't think Nevada knows what that means. We're a country of mines and gold, very sterile and yet rich. We can afford some ideals. We really ought to be a territory and not a State; at any rate, it's the man they're going for—*they want Kirkland*, policy or no policy; they'll follow him where he goes. Look!" he said, and pointed to a banner that hung so low it nearly touched our horses' ears. There were two caricature faces—Stephen's and Seth Collins's. It said:

FOR PRESIDENT, 19—, STEPHEN KIRKLAND

LIBERAL AND HONEST POLITICS

FOR GOVERNOR, SETH COLLINS

And this was the way the city welcomed him, and I wished Cornelia Van Buren could have seen the procession. She used to be fond of them in the past.

CHAPTER LXI



HE had been back in Oretown in the dear old house ten days. After the demonstration, as soon as I could steal my husband away, we returned for a breathing-spell to the smaller town where we could rest. Stephen was worn out; the demonstration had "touched him profoundly, overwhelmed him, gone down into his soul," he said. "To hear the voice of your fellow-beings crying your name in affection, enthusiasm, and praise! Why, don't listen to any man who tells you he is deaf to such sounds, Esther—they are sublime!" That was the night at the hotel in Carson City, when we reached our rooms at last and he put his head down on the table and stayed so, his face buried for quite a while.

Out at Oretown he slept for the first few days; then, later, went into the garden and read there in the arbor; and one afternoon, when he lingered, I found him fishing 'way up the creek.

He was himself again, and that evening when he went to his room I followed him, *for I thought that the time had come.*

"You feel rested now, Stephen, don't you?"

And he exclaimed: "I feel new-born, my dear girl—like a child in a new universe. Ever since I touched the West this time golden doors have opened. I have gone into an Eldorado out of which, please Heaven, I shall never come."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

He sat down on the window-sill, his head against the light. There were whittlings over at the fireplace and on the floor; he had opened a whole bunch of pencils, and held them bristling in his hand.

" . . . It's astounding, Esther, how we go on from phase to phase in life, to find each vital to us and immutable, until the next comes and we lay our old shells down and gaze in amazement at each new self, dazzled (if we would only confess it) by the new lustre on our new wings. It's right this should be so, otherwise we would not work for each illusion, delusion, inspiration, resurrection—as you will."

His face clouded, and he stopped, for he saw an expression on my face which, for once, he did not understand.

"What is it, Esther? You've got something to say to me?"

"Yes, Stephen. You asked me in Carson City, before we went to Washington, about Petey, and I never told you. He's married."

"Well," my husband laughed, relieved, "Petey might have a worse history! Was it a native woman?"

"Yes. I thought you would feel disgraced."

"By no means! I've always considered that at least in the matter of choosing a life companion a man's taste should be unquestioned, even as to color! No doubt the girl is a princess, as they often are out there, and if you should ask them here she would refuse to eat with us—let's invite them."

"No, I've decided to go out and see them. I mean to go to my brother."

He turned pale in the flushing light, even, that fell on him with the sunset.

"I don't follow you, my dear girl." Then he stopped.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"*That's* not quite sincere! I suppose I *do* know what you mean."

His saying this gave me courage, and I said: "I've stayed on and on, till now, ever since Albany, because I thought you needed me."

"I need you now," he said, and I shook my head.

"Why not, pray?" he asked.

And I said: "Because you've found your balance and you are a great man. The country has proved how it regards you."

He looked down at his pencils, passed his hand across his brow, and started to speak, then put out his hand to take mine. I gave it him, and he held it, then let it fall.

"If I began to ask your forgiveness, Esther, I'd have to go back to Wall Street, when I first asked you to lead my miserable steps—when I began to lean on your kind shoulder—"

"Don't begin, Stephen; it's not that I ever wanted."

And he nodded slowly. "I know you well enough never to *have* begun!" And he went on: "If it's any satisfaction to hear me say that no man has ever paid more fully for his weakness—"

"You're not weak, Stephen, and I don't like to hear you say so. Just let everything lie as it is—as it has been, without blame."

He asked, quickly: "And you go to Samoa?"

"Yes."

I waited so long here that my heart grew cold. I saw myself take the train from the Junction, take the ship, and Stephen return to Washington alone.

"You've been unhappy, then?" he mused, at length.

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"You've stood by me through the long day and been unhappy yourself, Esther?"

"If you had asked me this out here in Oretown before we went East, Stephen, I couldn't have answered as I can now. I was too absorbed in your career—in your life, in your struggle—to know or think how *I* felt."

"Well—well—and you no longer *are* absorbed in these things?"

"No; not so that I can't feel—and *know* that I am feeling."

He glanced at me quickly with his great eyes.

"I think my courage has given out, Stephen," and I tried to say it lightly and to smile.

He covered his face with his hand a minute, then exclaimed, angrily:

"This is all nonsense, all nonsense—ridiculous!" And as quickly changed his tone, and half cried: "A man with a temperament like mine should *never* marry!"

"Don't say that, Stephen. He should marry the right woman."

"God!" he exclaimed, fiercely. "To have her leave him at the turning-point of his career—at the crisis of his life?"

"No, no, Stephen, you've passed all those points. You're at the top, and you must not go on with the wrong woman."

He repeated the words: "The wrong woman!" And said, violently: "You take leaving your husband as if he were a house you wanted to leave and re-let! Do you realize what such a scandal would be?"

"Not as I plan," I answered. "I shall go away, and, little by little, when I don't return, you can call it desertion and get a divorce."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"And what then?"

"You can marry Mary Tempest."

He jumped up, thrust his hands in his pockets, looked at me hard, then cried: "Mary Tempest! Not if she were the last woman on God's earth!"

I waited.

"She hasn't one sincere conviction, one high-minded ideal! I don't care," he exclaimed at me, as though I were urging him to an unpleasant duty, "if I never lay eyes upon her again!"

But at his mention of her—or my mention of her—the long-pent-up anguish of years, the long strain of my life as an unsuccessful wife burst on me as if I had been a crumbling rock too long beaten by the waves. I went all to pieces then and there. I felt the stone in me, which no hand had ever rolled away and no grief melted, melting now, dissolving now, and I remembered, too, that my husband had never seen me cry.

"I can't stand it any longer, Stephen!"

"Stand what, pray?"

In his way he was as hard as I.

"Being an utter failure!"

"I don't think people would agree with you. You've brought me from being a degenerate citizen to what the world would call Success."

"Yes, as far as you are concerned, but—what about me?"

I had always been able to meet his eyes, and I knew them well: how they widened like a boy's at times, and crinkled up at the corners when he was amused, and their look of tragedy. Now I couldn't see how they looked, for mine were blind.

As we faced each other silently, I knew that he was go-

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

ing over his past, and the nights and days must have been many in which Esther Kirkland had no part. I wanted to say, "To be a successful wife a woman must fill the man's *every* need, and I haven't done that," but I knew my words would tangle up in tears.

I went to the bureau, and took out a parcel and gave it to him—laid it in his hands, always without meeting his eyes yet.

"You asked for it in the train, Stephen, but I waited to see how you took Carson City and all—"

And my husband opened the old manuscript of his drama which I had picked up off the floor in Washington Square the day it was refused. He turned it over, tore off the wrapping, went back to the window-seat and sat down again, his drama in his hands, and began to turn the pages. Then I could look at him. His face was radiant; he exclaimed as a boy might who comes upon hidden treasure for which he had been digging against all the wise heads' advice. He read some lines aloud, and laughed:

"Gad! Why, it's the real thing, Esther! It's all right—the real thing. Listen—I had clean forgotten this line—it's miles above the public. *Of course* it was refused; it's crude and young, and needs rewriting from start to finish, but it's the real thing!"

He handled it as if it were precious, absorbed himself in it, and I watched him in the west window, the sunset back of him. I thought I'd go then, and leave him so—with his book. But at the door I remembered a letter. I had carried it about in my pocket all day, since morning, and wouldn't give it to him—a letter from Washington in black-bordered paper—and he glanced up as I put it in his hands.

"It came this morning."

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

"Did it?" he answered, indifferently, and laid it down on the window-sill. "Where did you find it, Esther?"

"On your study table with the newspapers."

"No, no; I mean *Lucia di Siena*."

I told him.

"It was like you, my dear girl, to keep it for me. You don't know what you have given me back, Esther—inspiration, ambition, youth, and my art!" He repeated the words "my art," and rolled up the manuscript and held it in his slender hands.

"I am not a financier or a politician. I am a writer born, by nature and temper, fatally, terribly, miserably a writer—nothing else in the world." He asked me if there were any cigars and matches, and when I said no, he said: "Never mind, never mind, it's only a habit to want to look at new schemes, new ideals through smoke. Let it go—I'll look at these heavenly visions through clear atmosphere." He touched the manuscript tenderly as though it had life, and I saw that the few pages enfolded for him, now, all the world.

"Every beautiful island in the Ægean Sea calls me, every azure coast I have purposely avoided because I was afraid to touch a shore with my dreams, now calls me. I can afford to dream. I will build a pink villa on Como with ilex and cypress alleys, and steep my soul in the ideal. I shall make my mark yet, my dear girl. *I shall make my mark!*"

I believed him. It did not seem to me the ravings of a vain idealist; it seemed true. I believed him—I knew him, and that he had found his road at last, and the manuscript in his hand became a real thing to me—a live, real thing, more real; more *true* than anything that had been in his life or come between us yet—and the thought that he was com-

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

plete without me and *didn't need me* broke my heart! The next thing I knew I was just clinging to him.

"Stephen! Not without me! Can you do it without me?"

I felt him catch me—I should have fallen. I heard him say: "Esther, Esther, for God's sake, my darling!" *I heard him say those words.*

I didn't cry long, but it must have been a great storm, for I was shaking with it, and he as well, for he carried me like a child and laid me on the bed, and when I had calmed he was kneeling by my side.

"You're ill—worn out. What is the matter, Esther?"

"You didn't know I could cry, did you, Stephen?"

"Why, now you speak of it, it *is* a revelation, but I think I rather like it." He had both my hands. "Why did you cry like that? Why did you say those things to me before you gave me my book?"

His face had a wonderful look upon it of gladness and power in spite of tears, and it wasn't his art, either, that caused it. It was the same light that had begun to shine long ago—when I brought him down the green umbrella in Wall Street; it had shone on me again in Washington; it shone on me now, and I saw it through my tears.

"Esther," he said, in the voice I had thought so beautiful when I heard him plead in the Senate—"Esther, your weeping now as you did—what you've said—makes me dare to think you've forgiven me—haven't you—haven't you?"

"That's not the word, Stephen."

"If I am mistaken, then don't tell me so, but if what I think is true—what I would rather have than fame or life—tell me so, tell me so, my dear girl."

And then when, of all moments, I should have been strong

A SUCCESSFUL WIFE

to answer him, there was only the foolish weakness of tears in me. I drew up my voice, though, when it threatened to break and fail me. I remembered the words he had used about himself.

"Stephen—I'm jealous—that's all; 'fatally, miserably, terribly' *jealous*—I can't bear it—I can't—"

And he seemed to like this as he had liked my tears.

He lifted my hands and laid them in his on his breast.

"I must say it's your own fault, my dear girl, if you are, or ever have been, jealous; I know it now. I have known it for some weeks—but that's neither here nor there; all I see or know is that you couldn't *be* jealous unless what I think is true." I suppose he saw, too, that I wouldn't speak yet, that I wanted him to go the whole way. "I mean, my darling, that you're *in love* . . ."

"*That's* true, Stephen, '*miserably, terribly*' true!"

I could almost hear his heart beat, and I saw his face as my heart had ached to see my husband's face.

"My dear girl . . . it's a trouble you don't have to bear alone."

He kissed me—then he gave a cry like that of a thirsty man who has found the Source and tasted Life there. He caught me to him. I kissed him and called him "*Stephen! Stephen!*" over and over again, and it was as if I had said his name for the first time.

THE END



This book should be returned to
the Library on or before the last date
stamped below.

A fine of five cents a day is incurred
by retaining it beyond the specified
time.

Please return promptly.

77 H
SUN 20 4 88
18 1877



AL 1173.7.75

A successful wife :

Widener Library

004664483



3 2044 080 904 386